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CLAUD E. STRACEY.

April 1894.

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TWO TALES OF MARRIED LIFE.

BY

GEORGIANA M. CRAIK AND M. C. STIRLING.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

TWO TALES

OF

MARRIED LIFE.

HARD TO BEAR.

BY

GEORGIANA M. CRAIK.

A TRUE MAN.

BY

M. C. STIRLING.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1878.

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A TRUE MAN.

BY

M. C. STIRLING.

"Trustie to the end."

"Man cannot make, but may enoble fate,
By noble bearing it. So let us trust
Not to ourselves, but God, and calmly wait
Love's orient, out of darkness and of dust."

OWEN MEREDITH.

A TRUE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

Where is there the wooer, young and true and bold,
Ready for adventure as a knight of old?
If there be a suitor in this modern day,
Let him ride a-wooing, none shall say him nay.

The Lady of the Palace.

THE Red Hall was undoubtedly the pride of the neighbourhood for miles round. From the shepherd's shieling, nestling under the crags of the Eagle's Scaur, to the comfortable farmhouses half hidden among the yellow ricks and deep foliage of the Erne valley, not a dissentient voice would have been heard, had a traveller pronounced it the most picturesque and "beinly," as it was certainly the oldest house in the district.

It was built on the southernmost spur of the Scaur, a huge hill on whose windy sides rock and boulder alternated with slopes of grass, while its crown was the weather-worn crag from which it derived its name.

Round the Hall itself were sturdy trees and trim flower-beds, but its special boast in that region of

turfy downs was a small wood of bright-stemmed Scotch firs, beneath whose whispering boughs blossomed the true heather of the north.

The drawing-room windows looked out upon a couple of steep terraces, where snowdrops, crocuses, and cowslips spangled the grass in turn. Below stretched a pretty park, with a stream from the hills winding among the knolls, and beyond this again lay the farms that had belonged for unreckoned years to the Red Hall.

Generation after generation of Percys had been born, had lived and died here, and while wars, civil and foreign, had shorn the neighbouring estates of many a fair field, not one of these stalwart Squires had ever parted with an acre of the land that his forefathers had left him.

As a natural consequence, the squire of to-day was a poorer man than he of a hundred years ago. Younger children cost more, living was more expensive, and when Squire Harold came to man's estate, he knew that it behoved him so to live that he might be enabled to rescue the old place from a burden of debt left on it by his father. A very brief glimpse of the outer world was all therefore that he allowed himself ere settling down among the glens. Nevertheless, in that short time he contrived to win a wife whose fair face and gentle spirit made her queen, as by right divine, over the whole countryside. But the fair face was too delicate for health,

and after a few years of happy wifehood, "our Lady Alice," as the people fondly called her, died of heart disease, leaving a six-year-old child, another Alice, to be her father's chief care and comfort.

In his new loneliness he begged his eldest sister, now a childless widow, to come and visit him. She was speedily installed as mistress of the house, nor could her little niece have had a kinder or more judicious guardian. Life sped quietly and quickly at the Hall, the more quietly that both the Squire and Mrs. Ramsay were anxious to save a good portion for their darling. Such provision was needful, as the estate was entailed on heirs male, and must therefore pass at the squire's death to his nephew Walter, who was Alice's senior by a year. The boy's father had died early, and his mother hated a country life, but he invariably spent part of his holidays with his uncle, that he might be indoctrinated with the traditions and customs of the Hall.

It might, of course, happen that the cousins would take a fancy to each other, and in that case her father felt that it would be pleasant to leave Alice mistress of her old home, but he was too wise to let her be dependent on such a chance.

Considering how much they were thrown together, it was strange that up to the time when they were respectively seventeen and eighteen, no thought of love had marred the merry boy and girl friendship that existed between the two. Perhaps such fre-

quent companionship had left no room for illusions on either side.

Alice's seventeenth birthday was celebrated with more than the usual festivity. On that morning she was formally emancipated from the schoolroom, though her old governess remained with her for a while as a guest. After breakfast, Mrs. Ramsay led her into a spare room and displayed her present, a snowy fabric of silk and tulle, on which lay sprays of maiden blush roses. It was hard to say which of the two looked the happiest—the old lady, peering delightedly over her spectacles at her niece, or the girl as she examined the costume, touching it daintily, while she thanked her aunt for procuring her a dress from a real London dress-maker for her first ball. Her father's gift awoke graver thoughts, for he placed in her hands a faded red morocco case, containing her mother's jewels. Among these were some strings of fine pearls, and as she gazed at them a shadowy vision rose before her mind's eye. She remembered dimly a fair face bending over her little bed, and that she had twined her fingers among the pretty white beads that perhaps were never worn after that night.

Other presents were not wanting, and their variety showed that Alice was likely to become as universal a favourite as her mother. Lady Mary Courtenay, the acknowledged great lady of the district, send a handsome locket to "her old friend's

daughter," and Walter gave her a finely-painted fan. Thoroughly as she appreciated these gifts, her thanks were as cordial to the humbler friends who could offer her nothing more costly than a freshly gathered bouquet or a pair of pretty Bantams.

Two nights later, in one of the bedrooms of the crowded Hurlborough Hotel, Alice is being arrayed for that important event in a girl's eyes, her *début* in society. Aunt Jane has accompanied her so as to hear the very first account of her evening, but she does not intend to chaperon her, the Squire and Lady Mary are to do that.

At present she is in a greater flutter than her niece; she has dropped her grey shawl in her hurry, and is pulling out puffs and straightening bows, while Moss, the old nurse, with her mouth full of pins, stands back for a last admiring gaze.

The lissome figure, as graceful in motion as in repose, the light brown wavy hair in which the rosebuds nestled, the eyes, as grey as a soft spring sky, and the delicately-curved mouth, deserved all the praise bestowed upon them. Alice was a creature, too, to whom joyousness seemed natural; she laughed as sweetly as she sang, and danced with spontaneous grace. Her thoughts were full of the subdued content of a loved, loving, and healthy nature, yet there were times when quite another mood would take possession of her, and the pathos of a border ballad, or the fire of an heroic tale, would

bring a tearful tremulousness to her mobile face. It was as though the chords of her spirit vibrated to an unseen touch, giving promise of fuller harmonies to come. To-night her cheek is the colour of her blush roses, and she laughs merrily at Moss.

"Come, nursie, surely I am all right now, and it must be getting late."

"Well, miss, I say as we all said, when you tried your dress on at the Hall, 'There may be showier young ladies, but there'll be ne'er a bonnier one than ours.'"

"I'm afraid other people won't think so, nursie. Listen, isn't that the music tuning?"

"It's a great thing being able to walk straight into the ball-room," quoth Aunt Jane—"that's what I told your father when he wanted to go to the old hotel. Getting into a cab would have ruined that tulle. There he is at the door. Good night, darling; here's your fan—yes, your gloves and handkerchief. Good night. Don't catch on that box. Good night."

Fussing like an anxious hen over her solitary chick, Aunt Jane watched her charge glide away down the long passage on her father's arm; then she gathered up her shawl, and garrulous Moss shut the door, and helped her to bed.

Everybody knows that a county ball is the very hotbed of etiquette and dignity. She who makes her entry under judicious chaperonage, and is taken

to the right end of the room, is sure to get on, unless her dancing be execrably bad. Even then some obsequious Smith or Brown will probably be found to do duty with her. On the other hand, the *débutante* whose arrangements are unskilful, is lost for the night, and may be thankful if she picks up a stray officer or two, as unknown as herself.

Lady Mary Courtenay was thoroughly versed in these matters, as became the leader of the county society. She owed this dignity partly to her own talent, partly to her position, for she was daughter of a stately Earl, whose presence ornamented all public entertainments, and wife of a hard-working baron, who sat upon every Board in the district.

Mrs. Percy and she had been intimate friends, and she therefore offered to take Alice under her wing, though she had great doubts as to the attire that might emanate from the old-fashioned Hall. She was not a little pleased to see that virtue was rewarded, and that the latest addition to her flock was likely to be its greatest ornament.

"Bless me, child, what a lovely dress! That wasn't made at home, I'm sure."

"Oh, no," said Alice, with a little pride, "aunt got it from Madame La Cour."

"La Cour! She's a wise woman, your aunt. Tell her I said so. Anybody with you besides your cousin? Your father? Oh, well, he can take you into the

room if you like, then stand by me, and don't let your cousin have too many round dances."

Marshalling her party behind her, the great lady took the Earl's arm, and sailed into the ball-room, dispensing bows and smiles as she moved to the upper end of it. Alice was the only one who thought this procession trying; to the others it was a matter of course or a matter of pride, according as their blood was of the bluest or a commoner quality.

Lady Mary need not have feared that Walter would monopolise his cousin. He treated her with brotherly familiarity, but a blue-jacketed hussar whose spurs clanked deftly in time to the music, was to him more attractive than the prettiest girls in the shire. They, indeed, were "only good for a fellow to waltz with," while the soldier was a model for imitation. There was no lack of partners for Miss Percy however, and she was noticed by many who did not obtain an introduction.

"Uncommonly pretty girl that," said Blaize of the Artillery to Lord Dasche Ryder, whose close-clipped, bullet-shaped head and florid complexion suited well with his heavy dragoon uniform.

"Yes—good stepper—quite unbroken, though."

"Do you mean that girl in the foamy dress over there? She's the prettiest in the room," said a third soldier, who was leaning against the doorway, and who wore the uniform of a line regiment. He was taller than his companions, but so well proportioned

that a casual observer would not have believed he stood six feet in his stockings. Regulation cut could not take the curl out of his brown hair, his eyes were a clear hazel, his smile like sunshine, and on his breast was the little bronze cross that makes every woman take note of its wearer. Nothing ever disturbed his air of high-bred ease, and though he was no dandy, no one in his regiment could dress like him. After the dustiest field-day men said Harcourt was two shades cleaner than his neighbours; cooler he certainly was, perhaps because he was apt to be indolent. "She's a new-comer, isn't she?" he continued, watching Alice as he spoke.

"Very new. Positively believes everything one says. Quite stumps one. I don't know that line of country," replied Lord Dasche, whose home was near Harcourt's, so that they were intimate with each other.

"By Jove! I'll ask Lady Mary to introduce me. It would be refreshing to talk sense for once."

"Too late now. Card full. Heard her say so, and of course *she* means it."

"Who's that you're talking about?" asked a very young and tiny ensign, lounging up to the speakers.

"Miss Percy, the belle of the ball," said the gunner.

"Oh, 'The Woman in White.' Most extraordinary, I never saw her till half an hour ago. I really would have asked her to dance if I had."

"What a loss to her! You see you never look beyond the front ranks, Dicky," said Harcourt, smiling at the small man.

"Course not. Why the deuce should I? If girls want to be seen, why don't they come to the front?"

"Exactly, as you do yourself. You'll never let a big man eclipse you, my boy."

"No; why the deuce should I?" reiterated the youngster, whose remarks bore a family resemblance to each other.

"Oh, you're quite right from your point of view. There are various gifts, you know. You're apt to be a little too much to the front, and I'm apt to be a little too late."

"I'll back Dicky's gift, as you call it, to land him at the winning-post. No use hankering after Miss P. to-night, so come to supper," said Lord Dasche.

"All right. I've done most of my dancing, and been bored enough. One girl was intolerable, talked what she meant for shop to me; the next was as bad, with her scandal from town; and the third was too blown to speak at all. I might try her again by-and-by."

Harcourt was apt to be fastidious in his choice of partners, but his face was more good-humoured than his words. As he and his friend entered the supper-room they were met by a gentleman from their own neighbourhood. Very soon they were in

deep conclave on covers and poachers, and more than one damsel, as she passed the group, thought it extremely unfair that three good dancers should so waste their time.

But the merriest night must have an end, and Hurlborough entertainments terminated early, as most of the county magnates had many miles to drive. The towns-people, indeed, indulged in a riotous polka or two, rejoicing in the space, and blossoming out of draughty corners with fresh vigour, after the calmly critical Earl had departed. These dances, however, were a sort of postscript, hurried, and, as it were, illegitimate; the ball was over when some eight or ten carriages had driven off.

Alice danced round with Walter to the door, where her father was patiently waiting for her; and as she looked back at the bright room, where a galop was still ringing out, she said, with a sigh of satisfaction, "Well, good night, Walter, I didn't think anything could have been as nice as this."

"Jolly for girls, I daresay, but give me a day's hunting," replied her cousin; "however, you look well on parade, Allie, and you don't expect a fellow to talk bosh to you, which is a comfort; good night."

Kindly Lady Mary was delighted with Alice Percy's pretty ways. A year had elapsed between their last meeting and the Hurlborough ball, and a year brings flowers of this sort to perfection.

Had she been able to please herself, Lady Mary would have carried the girl off at once to Courtenay Dene, and there laid good-natured plots for her marriage. A complete obstacle to any scheme of the sort was the expected arrival of her eldest son, who was romantic, in spite of being an Oxonian and a traveller.

With motherly instinct she felt that Alice came very near the ideal he cherished; and, to do her justice, wished heartily that the two could have been allowed to meet, but reasons of state forbade. The shoe had begun to pinch a little at Courtenay Dene; there was a powdered head fewer in the servants' hall, and, what was far worse, a couple of empty stalls in the fine old stable, so the careful mother dared not place a penniless temptation in the way of the heir.

Her business was, on the contrary, to find a bride rich enough to be worth a sacrifice, and humble enough to bear tutoring, so that the other victim should not be stabbed too cruelly.

But her son was not due at home for a week, and during that time she might be hospitable without any risk or reflection, so Alice returned with her to the Dene. The few days she spent there were a glimpse into another world, yet she seemed glad to seat herself again in her own low chair, between her father and aunt, at the Hall.

"I felt as if I were acting a play, Auntie," she

said, in answer to their inquiries. "The rooms are so large, and so beautifully furnished, and everyone speaks and moves so quietly and yet so prettily, it seemed to me there must be an audience somewhere looking on!"

"Yet Lady Mary is as motherly as though she were in a cottage," said the Squire, who recalled many a thoughtful kindness shown to his wife by the owners of the Dene.

"Oh, yes, she was so good to me, and she stroked my hair once and said it was like mamma's," returned Alice gravely. "But still I should not like to be too long at the Dene. I think I missed my every-day dress. You know I always hated Sunday frocks on week-days, Auntie."

"And on Sunday too, if I remember right."

"Of course, for I could not go black-berrying or do anything pleasant in them. Now at the Dene everybody is in the Sunday frock state—at least, it seemed so to me."

"So, on the whole, you are not sorry to come home, my Alice?"

"Very glad to come, father. I have seen a pretty play, but my own Scaurside is more to my taste."

"That's well. It would not do for you to envy the ladies of the Dene."

"I envy the gentlemen though!" exclaimed the girl. "They seem to have so many interests, so much more life than we. They have work to do.

Even Lord Courtenay's Boards are something real, better worth attending to than our frocks."

"Being born a woman, however, you cannot sit on Boards," remarked the Squire drily. His daughter knew she was approaching dangerous ground, so she checked herself, and rose to leave the room.

"I like to listen to the talk of the working half of the world—that is all I meant, father. I am going out now to read to Betty Parsons."

"Which is as useful as talking, my dear," he replied.

No doubt her father was right, but Alice's ignorant young heart was longing for the experience that so ill repays the cost of gaining it. Her girlish eyes could find an interest in Lord Courtenay's self-imposed labours, that they failed to discover in poor Betty's patiently endured toils. She had, in fact, been taken out of the dreamy quiet of her glen, and relished the flavour and sparkle of the life she had glanced at. Fortunately her nature was too healthy for prolonged discontent, and her wonted habits soon re-asserted themselves. Ere many days passed, she resumed her solitary rambles and homely occupations as happily as though she had never entered a ball-room, or trod the tapestried corridors of Courtenay Dene. It never occurred to the Squire or Aunt Jane that they ought to take her into society, for gaiety in their eyes was not an essential ingredient in happiness. Moreover, they had that

placid faith in the future that usually pervades such well-ordered and uneventful lives, a faith which made it appear certain that, at the fitting time, some suitor would come, like the prince in a fairy-tale, for their treasure. In their secret hearts they wished for some more royal suitor than Walter, who, despite the advantages of heirship, hardly merited the prize. As often happens, their wishes were fulfilled in the letter, though not in the spirit.

Summer faded into autumn, the gold of the bracken was changing to cinnamon, and the rowan trees were heavy with scarlet berries.

It was market day in the nearest town, and the winding glen roads were dotted with figures returning to the farms in the afternoon. Among them rode Squire Percy on his brown cob, exchanging cheery greetings, as he passed the various groups. Beads of a rising fog clung about him when he reached home, and the cold air blew in sharply, as he hurried across the hall to the low drawing-room, where his daughter was touching plaintive melodies into life in the dusk.

"Here's a bit of news for you, Alice. The hounds meet to-morrow at Hazelshaugh, would you like to go and see them throw off?"

"Oh! yes, father," was the joyous reply. "How shall we go? Couldn't we ride?"

"Ride! No, no, I can't have you appear at a meet on poor old Bess; we must go in the pony-

carriage. We'll breakfast at the house, and as they're to draw the nearest wood, we're almost sure to see a bit of the run from the upper road as we come home. The fox always heads across to the Grey Fell."

This was a longed-for opportunity for Alice, who was eager to refresh a misty recollection of red coats and glossy horses, the sight of which once made a marked day in her monotonous childhood.

Mr. Philips, the owner of Hazelshaugh, was an enthusiastic lover of sport. But for this circumstance the M.F.H. would probably never have visited that neighbourhood; as it was, a meet was a rare event. Philips did all he could to make up for the awkwardness of the country; his woods were never drawn blank, his breakfasts were all that sportsman or epicure could desire, and no bad rider was ever to be found among the quota of guests invited to stay at his house on these occasions.

When Mr. Percy and his daughter entered the dining-room at Hazelshaugh on the morning of the meet, the long table appeared to be already full, but a gentleman hastily rose and made room for Alice between himself and the hostess.

"Thanks," said the latter. "Must I introduce you? Captain Harcourt, Miss Percy; I thought you had met at the ball."

"I had not that pleasure," replied Harcourt, "I heard Miss Percy's card was quite full before I

could get an introduction. I hope I may be more fortunate next time."

"Balls do not come often in Hurlborough," said Alice, colouring painfully as she took her seat. She was not yet accustomed to the polite nothings of social talk, but her quick ear noted the pleasant tone of her companion's voice, and his frank manner soon set her at ease, so that she began to observe the other guests.

On Mrs. Philips' left hand sat a dark, good-looking man, whose features expressed strongly the half-contemptuous nonchalance that so often characterises a soldier. There is a subdued self-assertion in such faces, which imposes wonderfully on the inexperienced, so that these habitual believers in themselves are too often taken at their own valuation.

Next to him was a lady, thoroughly conscious of Alice's fascinated gaze, though after one quick measuring glance she did not show that she was aware of the girl's existence.

She was a tall, handsome woman, in a perfectly fitting riding-habit, and with her abundant dark hair rolled in tight coils round her head.

Her smile, which she knew how to *ménager* in society, keeping it in reserve as a special weapon, was marvellous in its sudden brilliancy. People who knew her best said that in the rare moments when she used it without reflection, it lit up her

face as if with a flush of absolute colour. To very few was such a privilege accorded, for her life, which had been a strange one, was studied down to its minutest details.

Her father was a confirmed gambler, and she had no memories of her mother whereby to guide herself. Threats and persuasions had induced her at nineteen to marry an officer to whom her father owed large sums.

There was nothing prepossessing about Captain Brabazon, but he treated her at least politely, and she longed to escape from her home to a life of comparative ease. Surely, she thought, with her beauty and cleverness, she could mould this stolid wooer to her will. She had not known how greatly the sense of possession alters a man; ere a month was out she found her persuasions and thrusts of sarcasm alike foiled by her husband's obstinate mastery. Baffled in her very moderate hopes of happiness, she was tempted to appeal to a wider circle for the dominion denied her at home.

Her success awoke her to a full consciousness of her powers, and a determination to use them to the utmost, so that at five-and-twenty, Maud Brabazon's name was well known as that of a woman no less calculating than she was clever.

Alice Percy hardly knew whether this calm beauty or the lazy indifference of the gentleman opposite attracted her most; but while she watched the one

openly, she listened for the infrequent remarks of the other. The breakfast-table was narrow, and at times the conversation glanced across it.

"What sort of mount have you to-day, Diver?" inquired Captain Harcourt; and without waiting a reply continued, addressing the lady,

"Ah, Mrs. Brabazon, you have never hunted with the Diver before; keep well away from him, I beseech you, especially at his fences."

"What is his especial form of iniquity?" asked Maud, with a look at the imperturbable face beside her.

"The iniquity isn't his, except in choosing the animal he rides. If you see any particularly vicious brute to-day be sure the Diver's on its back. I believe he breaks in other men's horses for the fun of it, and I know he sells beasts on the strength of some feat that they couldn't have performed with any other rider."

"The English of that is that I once offered my friend Cecil a fine hunter I couldn't afford to keep. He fought shy. I rode the animal, and he carried me in such style that I sold him after the run for a higher figure than I asked Cecil in the morning."

"Yes, just my luck," grumbled Harcourt; "I'm always too late for every prize; but really now, Diver, what have you got here to-day?"

"Well, it's a chestnut you've seen once before."

"Whew! That horse in this country, where there

isn't a single fence with a decent take-off! If I were the senior subaltern, I should say my chances of promotion were increasing."

"I am quite curious to see this performance," said Maud. "I shall keep within sight of you, Captain Ainsworth, if the run is not too exciting."

"I shall have a reason for riding my best then," he replied with a slight inclination as they rose from the table.

Alice, seeing he was out of earshot, asked her neighbour, with a shade of eagerness, "Who is that gentleman with the curious name?—Mr. Diver, I think you called him."

"That is only his nickname. He is Captain Ainsworth of my regiment, and he got that sobriquet after two severe duckings at a water-jump."

The speaker's gravity was somewhat tried, and he was relieved and pleased when Alice laughed musically at her blunder.

"Why, I thought it was only schoolboys gave nicknames, or at least very young men," she added, remembering certain phrases of her cousin's.

"And you think my friend and I are no longer very young. Well, you are quite right, from the point of view of a first ball. Did you find that night as pleasant as you had expected?"

"Oh, much pleasanter; I had no idea the music and dancing could be so delightful," replied Alice, flushing slightly as she recalled that wonderful even-

ing. She looked so pretty that Harcourt involuntarily held out his hand as he wished her good-bye, and expressed a hope that they might meet again.

"What a perfectly innocent face!" thought he, as he paused on the steps to light a cigar. "Why, that girl's soul would be like an uncut book—something absolutely new. That's a bad simile, though. Books never are quite new. There's a family likeness in them, as I suppose there is in women. Still I shouldn't fancy there were many points of resemblance between that little girl and Maud Brabazon, for example;" and Harcourt smiled as he drew his bridle through his fingers, and glanced at Mrs. Brabazon, just then springing lightly to her saddle, assisted by Captain Ainsworth. His thoughts would have been less careless could he have looked into the future, and seen how the lives of these two women would be entangled with his own.

Mrs. Philips, with the Percys and two or three other guests, stationed themselves at a gate on the avenue to see the riders pass.

Maud, who looked her best on horseback, led the way between her host and the Master; and he, although he hated the presence of ladies in the hunting-field, was compelled to acknowledge that she "seemed as if she meant business."

Ainsworth followed on a hot-tempered, nervous chestnut, whose mouth he humoured delicately. After these, well but not showily mounted, came Harcourt,

lifting his cap with easy grace to the ladies as he passed. Then followed a group of gentlemen, and the usual ruck brought up the rear—a hard-riding parson, two or three farmers, and some individuals from Hurlborough, whose position was as doubtful as their horsemanship was bad. Among the last rode a gentleman whom Alice had noticed at the breakfast-table, and who may best be described as indistinct. Hair, eyes, and complexion were pale, and even his dress was of an undecided kind. He wore, it is true, top-boots and breeches; but their fit would have driven a dandy to despair. His coat, with the leather on the shoulder, was clearly intended for another kind of sport, but in compliment to his present occupation, he had knotted loosely round his throat a white handkerchief spotted with foxes' heads in blue.

"Who is that remarkable person?" asked Mr. Percy. "He does not look like a sporting man."

"No, indeed," replied one of the ladies. "He never does look like anything in particular, least of all a soldier—yet he is one. It is Captain Brabazon of the Artillery. He won't ride far. I believe he hunts a little as he goes to dinner-parties, or plays croquet, because others do it, so he fancies it is correct. They say he cares for nothing but whist."

"A singular choice for his handsome wife to have made."

"Very. But he was richer when they married

than he is now. He had had a lot of money left him, but he gambled it away in six months."

"Served her right, if she married him for his money," quoth the uncompromising Squire, whose views, had he expressed them, would have been regarded as the extreme of romance by the fashionable lady he addressed. Just then an opportune stir among the now distant riders made him hurry Alice into the carriage and drive off, in order to reach the corner of the road, whence they hoped to see something of the run.

Hazelshaugh lay rather lower than the Red Hall and nearer to the open valley, while the home coverts were between the two. The fox was almost certain to go towards the Hall for some distance, and then turning to the right across a small brook, make for a wood on the other side of the hollow. Lookers-on who were lucky enough to be within sight when he struck down the hill-side, could get a fair view of the sport. Fortune favoured Alice, and the field, a small one now, passed near enough for her to observe Maud hesitate for a second, look back, and then, as though making up her mind, send her horse at an ugly bit of wall, which he cleared, and so sped with the rest out of sight. Looking back, also, an exclamation from Alice drew her father's attention, and they both stood watching the chestnut, who was obstinately refusing a hedge at a little distance. Twice, thrice, the sun shone on the bright head and

neck as the animal reared madly, but urged with whip and spur, he seemed to change his tactics, bounded over, and with a plunge that would have unseated many a rider tore madly along the field.

The Squire saw at once that the horse was almost unmanageable, and that Ainsworth, bent on recovering his ground, was coming across at an angle that must bring him to a sudden slope, ending in a rough wall and ditch that bordered the road on which he stood.

"Stand still and silent, Alice!" exclaimed he, flinging the reins to the groom and scrambling on to a boulder, from which he signalled to Ainsworth to keep higher up. It was too late, even if his signs had been understood; the chestnut was fairly running away, and, to the girl looking up from the road, seemed to come at a pace that was awful. Mr. Percy, finding his efforts in vain, wished to prevent his daughter from seeing the nearly inevitable accident; but before he could reach her, the chestnut almost struck the wall, rose wildly, there was a flash of red in the sun and a dull thud, as man and horse rolled over together.

Heedless of her father's voice, Alice flew along the road, and with her handkerchief wetted in the ditch, tried to wipe the blood from a cut on Ainsworth's white face, and with trembling fingers to loosen his collar.

"Oh, father, he's not dead, is he?" she cried, as

Mr. Percy put her aside and stooped over the insensible figure.

"I don't think so; but it's a miracle if he hasn't broken every bone in his body," he replied, somewhat testily. "I wonder if he has a flask about him; yes, here it is, that's a lucky chance, at least."

Having forced some of the contents through the closed lips, a faint groan soon relieved their fears, and Mr. Percy, desiring Alice to keep wet handkerchiefs on Ainsworth's forehead, turned his attention to the horse. The poor animal was lying so near his rider that there was some danger from his convulsive efforts to rise. As each struggle failed he sank down again, the thick dust gathering on his once glossy coat. He looked round, with almost human fear and pain in his great eyes and distended nostrils as the two men approached him, for the groom had fastened the ponies to a bush and run up.

"No chance for him, sir," said he to his master, "look here!"—and he pointed to the foreleg. "The sooner he's out of pain the better, poor brute!"

"Yes, indeed, we must see to it quickly, James. Better lift the gentleman further off. A fine horse, too. Upon my word, I am sorry for him."

Ainsworth had by this time recovered consciousness, but his left arm was broken, and his ankle badly sprained. He proposed that he should go

back to Hazelshaugh, if a carriage could be got, but the Squire would not hear of it.

"The Philips go away in two days, my dear sir, and you will be laid up for a bit. You are from Hurlborough, I think?"

"Yes. Captain Ainsworth, of the —th. Captain Harcourt, of ours, is at Hazelshaugh, and will let the Colonel know."

"Exactly. Then I will send word to Hazelshaugh, and get your man to see to your horse, and you must come home with me. I am Mr. Percy, and the Red Hall is only three miles off."

"But the trouble——" began the other, feebly.

"There's nowhere else you can possibly go, and the doctor lives near us, so make your mind easy. I only wish we could move you without suffering. I'm afraid you'll find the roads very rough."

Ainsworth was not in a condition to say much, and the Squire quickly arranged that Alice should walk by a short cut across the fields to a neighbouring farm, despatch a note to Mrs. Philips, and, if possible, procure a dogcart, and drive home, so as to prepare her aunt for the unexpected guest, who would be conveyed slowly in the pony-carriage.

Though her limbs trembled still, she hurried off, and made such good speed that a room was ready, and the doctor sent for, ere Ainsworth, who had fainted from pain, reached the door of the Hall.

CHAPTER II.

Where your soul is tempted
  Most to trust your fate,
There, with double caution,
  Linger, fear, and wait.

Trust no prayer nor promise;
  Words are grains of sand;
To keep your heart unbroken,
  Hold it in your hand.

A. A. PROCTOR.

NEXT day brought sundry callers to make inquiries for the invalid, among them Mrs. Philips and Cecil Harcourt. Though heartily sorry for his friend's mishap, he found himself thinking fully as much of Miss Percy, and his disappointment was great when he heard that she had gone out to the hill for fresh air and quiet. She came in, however, a few minutes before he left, and if he had been pleased with her brightness on the previous morning, he was not less interested by the quiet self-control with which she spoke of the accident, though her cheeks paled at the recollection.

"Your niece is courageous," he remarked to Mrs. Ramsay. "Many young ladies would have been quite overcome, and useless in such an emergency."

"The Percys are not brought up to be useless,"

said the old lady, smiling. "If a girl is taught to use her wits and her hands, she won't think of her feelings when there's anything to be done."

"Then I wish there were more Percys in the world, and fewer fine feelings!" he replied.

"Ah! but surface sentiment catches the world's eye, when practical folk get no credit."

"More's the pity. I'm afraid my friend's illness will tax your hospitality severely."

"Indeed, no. I should not have been happy if he had been taken past our doors. You must come and see him when the doctor allows it."

"With the greatest pleasure. I see Mrs. Philips is moving, so I am afraid I must say good-bye."

Much was said on the homeward drive of the Red Hall and its inhabitants, the Squire's sturdy energy, his sister's old-fashioned ways, and his daughter's beauty. All that he heard strengthened Captain Harcourt's determination to return; but man of the world as he was, he forgot to conceal his thoughts that evening from the eyes of an exacting woman. Maud Brabazon was far too wary to betray by look or word that she remarked his pre-occupation, or divined its cause. A question or two, their point skilfully veiled under anxiety for Captain Ainsworth, confirmed her suspicions, after which it was easy to guess that he would not be allowed to carry out his intention.

At breakfast next morning she seated herself by

him, and remarked on the considerateness of their host in sending a groom over early for news of the invalid. A shade crossed Harcourt's face, not unobserved, as he replied that he meant to have gone himself, and might have spared Mr. Philips the trouble.

"I am very glad you are not going," said Maud, who had herself suggested the despatch of the messenger. "You know you can do no good, for the doctor won't allow your friend to see anyone, and we were so dull yesterday that, as you go to-night, you might spend the morning in amusing us."

"Do you really need amusing, Mrs. Brabazon? I thought there were enough of your usual resources here to have kept you employed," answered Harcourt, who felt that he was being prevented from spending his day as he had intended, but was too lazy to assert himself.

"How cross you are! Do you know you are quite losing the *preux chevalier* manners that used to be your strong point. I thought they usually did last, whatever else might change or wear out;" and Maud turned to her neighbour on the other side, and adroitly left Harcourt out of the conversation that soon sparkled round her. He knew her stratagems well from previous experience, but could not help acquiescing in his own defeat, and saying, as he rose from breakfast,

"If I am not cross, shall I be received again into favour, Mrs. Brabazon?"

"Yes, if you are very nice, but you must come for a walk, or do something to help me through the morning."

"I submit, on condition of a full pardon."

"Granted," replied Maud, smiling as she moved away.

Harcourt, having accepted the position, exerted himself successfully in what society considers such hard labour, the getting rid of a whole precious day without too much weariness.

A drive to a little waterfall filled up two or three hours, and the only moments during which he felt thoroughly bored were when he found himself *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Brabazon at the head of the fall.

She knew she made a pretty picture in her dark blue serge dress and hat with drooping feather, as she leant over to look at the water, her fingers interlaced round a creamy-stemmed birch sapling, her white cuffs and the lace at her throat giving point to the general colouring. A year ago, her companion would have admired her immensely, now he leant against another tree and took out his cigar-case, a sure sign in such a position, that a woman's influence is on the wane or gone. Maud felt it keenly when he said, in a cool tone, as he struck a light,

"I needn't apologise to *you* for this, I know."

"No, not to me. If I were younger and sentimental I might say tobacco smoke is out of keeping with the scenery."

"Happily for me you don't say so. I do admire scenery, but at this moment my cigar is more to my mind."

"So I perceive. Smoke then, and be happy. I wonder," she continued, after a pause, "when we shall meet again. It was an odd chance our doing so here."

"Yes, it was. I am innocent of plans at present."

"Really? Innocent of all plans," asked Maud, quickly.

"Quite. I've had most of my leave, and shan't be sorry to get back to duty again at Hurlborough."

"Do you mean to go to India? Tell me, for we used to be friends, and I am curious."

"My dear Mrs. Brabazon, if you were the dearest friend I had in the world I couldn't answer such a question. You know we only move to Dublin next autumn, and they say at the Horse Guards we're to go on to India after we've been there a year. How on earth can I tell what I may do, or what may happen before then?"

"Perhaps it was a stupid thing to ask," she replied, dreamily. "Our battery goes in two years, and I don't know whether to like the idea, or be afraid of it."

"Like it, certainly, I should say. An Indian life would suit you capitally. But the rest of the party have gone on; shall we join them?"

"Yes, I've looked long enough at that hurrying water," said she, straightening herself and walking on quickly, while Cecil followed, as far behind as courtesy would admit, nor had they any further opportunity of conversation.

Deep down in each of these hearts flowed an undercurrent of thoughts, dim reflections and unrealised desires, that force of circumstance alone could bring to light.

So it is with all of us; these hidden thoughts may be distinct or shadowy, but in either case they are sufficiently unlike the ideas and words that lie on the surface of the mind, and are made known readily to everyone. We are puzzled to account for their existence, and fear, perhaps, to examine them closely; we only suspect that somewhere within us lurks a whole self, quite different from the one with which Brown and Jones are intimate. No doubt Brown and Jones, whom we have met every day for years, have their hidden personalities too.

On his way back to his regiment that evening, Harcourt, while comfortably ensconced in the corner of an empty smoking-carriage, reflected with half amused, half cynical feelings on his whole acquaintance with Mrs. Brabazon.

"What a shallow, clever woman that is," thought

he—"so quick to read one up to a certain point, and so incapable of seeing where her power ends. Perhaps I do her injustice; she may see it in a sort of way, but I'm certain she doesn't understand it. I wonder if she ever gets as tired of acting as we are of seeing her do it! If she were a whit less handsome, she'd be perfectly intolerable, and after all her good looks don't please one for very long. How well I remember my dear old father's criticism after he had seen me with her one day. 'Handsome, my dear boy, but underbred: never trust an underbred woman's instincts.' And he's quite right; his old-fashioned taste saw through her at once. And yet, absurd as it seems, I've a feeling that in good hands she might have turned out very differently. Well, she's never done me much harm—no thanks to myself though—but I'll keep clear of her in Dublin. I wish the battery were going anywhere else. Why on earth did she ask me about India? did she think I'd express a hope that we might be quartered together? Bah! little Alice Percy's face is worth twenty of hers," and here Harcourt lost himself in a dream that was half earnest.

At the same hour Maud Brabazon, in a becoming dressing-gown, was resting before her bedroom fire, previous to dressing for dinner. "How unlike," thought she, "Cecil Harcourt is to any other man I ever met, and how much nicer; he makes me feel different—better somehow, when I am with him. I

wonder what it is in him that does it, and why I have never been able to rouse him to take any interest in me. Never? Well, I certainly thought I had done so last year, but I was wrong. Even when I knew him best, I never saw anything at all like the look of real awakened interest in his face when he spoke of that Miss Percy last night. It was as if a new man had looked out of his eyes. And to-day too, I see he doesn't care a straw whether I go to India or not. Why should he? He's caught, I suppose, by the childish face of a girl that knows absolutely nothing of his world and its ways. What fools men are—and women too for that matter—for here am I, thinking about the ideas of a man to whom I am the merest acquaintance, who utterly baffles me, in fact. Ah! that's just why I do think about him, and why I am glad he's coming to Dublin. Yet what do I want—what does it really matter whether he pays me a little attention and comes to see me or not? It only fills up rather more time. If I had married a man I loved, I wonder if I should have been satisfied, or if life would always have been as wearisome as it is now. Cecil Harcourt, for instance—What an idea! Don't I remember the way that white-haired, aristocratic-looking father of his took my measure in the Park one day! I'm not good enough for people of that sort, so I had better make the most of a more piquant existence than theirs. '*Vogue la galère!*'

I'll think no more to-night, except about my get-up for dinner."

Time hung somewhat heavily at the Red Hall for the invalid, who had been so bruised and shaken by his accident that it was days before he could move without pain, and weeks before he was able to rejoin the regiment. The Squire and his sister, with thoughtless kindness, would not hear of his leaving until he was quite fit for duty, saying that to let him go back to Hurlborough while still on the sick-list would only retard his recovery. Thoughtless indeed it was of them, for very soon the slow entry of this pale invalid into the drawing-room brought into Alice's cheeks the colour that seemed to have completely deserted his own. It was in no pleasant mood that he allowed himself to be assisted down-stairs for the first time. Weak and weary, annoyed at his long illness in a stranger's house, he was also somewhat bored by what he thought the old-fashioned ways of the place, and had no expectation of finding any fresh amusement or interest. He was therefore agreeably surprised to find the Miss Percy, of whom he had but a vague recollection, undeniably pretty, and evidently anxious for his comfort.

Then ensued that tragi-comic home drama which is played so often, and ends so sadly for most of the actors. And yet who can blame them if they cast the characters mistakenly? When they first rehearse, each phrase comes so easily to the lips,

how can they foresee that few of them will play their chosen parts out to the end of the piece? It were as just to blame a girl who gathers flowers gaily as she descends a grassy slope, nor knows that the brightest flowers before her hang over the edge of a precipice.

It was imperative that Ainsworth should accept the graceful kindness, the pretty friendliness, of this "English lily;" it was amusing, too, to listen to her *naïve* remarks on a world she did not know. Once or twice her intelligence, no less than her education, made him feel at fault, but it was worth while to shelter himself behind a compliment in order to see the delicate flush on her face.

It was pleasant, no doubt, to respond to eager questioning, and recount tales of war and sport to a thoroughly believing listener. Besides these sufficient reasons for going with the stream, there was the absence of any alternative.

There was no one else in that quiet house to whom he could possibly talk. He cared little for politics, and less for farming, the Squire's favourite topics; and Mrs. Ramsay made him uncomfortable alike by her simplicity and her common sense.

Such were the excuses Ainsworth made to himself in later years. During his stay at the Hall he gave himself up, as his custom was, to the fancy of the moment, paying little heed to the possible consequences to himself, and none at all to their effect

on others. And thus shy Alice, who at first hesitated even to place a bouquet on the table by his arm-chair, was led to take a sort of charge of him.

"Alice will fetch your book for you," said Aunt Jane, one morning, when household cares needed greater attention than usual. Nothing was more natural than for Ainsworth to say, as the door closed, that he was ashamed of trespassing on Miss Percy's time, nor could he help looking with interest at the sweet face, as she replied that waiting on an invalid could not be wasted time, and that it was a pleasure to her to be useful.

Before long the bouquet was arranged daily on the table it was meant to adorn, and the choicest blossom was selected for Ainsworth's button-hole. Then it is tiring to hold a book always in one hand, and it was an agreeable change for Alice to read aloud to him.

Sometimes the servants forgot to leave a footstool ready for the weak foot, but Alice was there to fetch one. Once, when they were alone, a sudden cramp seized the injured limb, and she deftly supported the foot while she removed the footstool, but her cheeks were crimson when she rose, and she stole away, that he might not observe how her hands trembled.

In short, the poor child soon grew to love, not the reality—ah, no!—but an heroic ideal, that, in her innocence, she imagined to be Ainsworth's soul.

This handsome, still face, appeared to her to be full of soldierly pride and courage, the abstracted gaze of the deep eyes betokened chivalrous dreams and reflections far beyond her knowledge, for this was one fresh from a life of action, who had

"Drunk delight of battle with his peers."

To him the wide stirring world beyond her glens was so familiar that he could speak of it with a cynicism that frightened while it attracted her. And so she drifted rapidly and surely from her quiet haven into those deep waters where the stoutest sailor may fear and tremble at times, but where ignorant hearts like hers perhaps suffer less, because they do not recognize the signs of storm till the tempest is upon them, and with a sudden crash the boat goes down. No one perceived when the little craft began to rock on the rising tide, and drag her anchor, and when the sails were filling and glistening in the sunlight so that none could fail to observe them, the lookers-on said the day was fair, and wished her "Bon voyage!"

"Bon voyage!" Well, there is one port to which the weary mariners must attain in time, little Alice no less than those who knew better than she how to steer.

Had it not been so essentially feminine, it would have been strange that she never doubted her own reading of the nature she loved, never saw that the

dreamy gaze indicated only a bored vacuity, and that selfishness was the ruling motive of the nature she deemed so fine.

So complete was her devotion that Ainsworth himself gradually yielded to an influence that roused all that was best in him, and began to think seriously that he would do well to win this gentle girl for his wife.

While matters were at this stage, Captain Harcourt volunteered a visit of a few hours, and being pressed to remain longer, Ainsworth resolved to consult him.

The morning of his arrival was bright and frosty; the rich red walls and glittering window-panes of the Hall looked cheery and home-like as he drove up the avenue, and not less cosy and pleasant was the low drawing-room into which he was shown. A wood fire crackled in the wide grate, by which Mrs. Ramsay sat knitting socks for the school-children, and the visitor's quick eye observed at the opposite window a small table, on which lay an open book and bright piece of work, while close, very close, was drawn an easy-chair, evidently arranged for an invalid.

On the grand piano close by stood a tall vase of hot-house ferns and white chrysanthemums, that, by some unexplained association, recalled to him Alice's fair face.

In a few moments Ainsworth limped in, and after a hearty greeting, proposed that they should

go out. "You see, I'm not good for much yet, but the pine-wood's a capital lounge, and with your arm I can get as far as the bench there. It's better to come out for a smoke and escape that old lady for a while," he added, as they left the house.

"She seems a friendly, harmless soul, I should say," answered Harcourt.

"Oh, very; but one gets tired of harmless souls after a while."

"I've no doubt you do. How do you get on with the rest of the family?"

"The Squire's a good chap enough, but frightfully dull. The girl's by far the best of the lot. I want to know what you think of her, Harcourt."

"I can pretty well tell you that already."

"By-the-by, yes, she said she'd met you at that breakfast at Hazelshaugh. Pretty, isn't she?"

"Very," replied Harcourt curtly. "Is she away from home?"

"No; she'll be up here, I daresay. That's the worst of her—she's so awfully romantic. She's always mooning about the hills, and believes—by Jove! what doesn't she believe?"

"That's a nicish view, Ainsworth. You have really fallen on good quarters here."

"They're well enough. I wonder if she'll have the place?"

"Miss Percy, you mean? One would suppose so, as there's no son," replied Harcourt, and then

reproached himself for so replying. Why should he, of all men, encourage Ainsworth's evident train of ideas, unless, indeed, the girl's heart was touched? He changed the subject hastily.

"Here's the bench—let's sit down; I have one or two bits of news for you."

The two plunged at once into that particular form of "shop" that seems to the listeners so extraordinary, where Private Brown's last crime, the Colonel's last drill, and Sabretashe's last good thing at mess, are mingled with a *sauce piquante* of expletives and scandal. When an hour had slipped away, the speakers caught sight of Alice coming through the wood, her deep blue dress glinting between the ruddy stems, her cloak laid across her shoulder, and her hands full of fresh trails of ivy. She moved gracefully at all times, but such a word inadequately describes the beauty of every motion when she was alone with Nature, and, as she believed, unobserved.

Harcourt never forgot the few minutes during which he watched her coming down the path towards him, the stately poise of her figure, the easy step that combined maiden daintiness with the freedom of one accustomed to roam on the wide hills. He thought he had never seen anything sweeter than her smile of welcome, though, even as they shook hands, a shy glance betrayed how much more was already given to his companion.

"I hope you find Captain Ainsworth as well as you expected," she said, in the silvery voice that so pleased his ear.

"Much better; we must have him back to his work soon."

"Yes, I suppose he will be going before long," she answered, her eyes deepening as she spoke.

"I shall be glad to see the regiment again," said Ainsworth, "I feel as lazy as one of the turtles we used to 'turn' at Karachi; do you remember, Sis, how the poor brutes lay on their backs in the sand? By Jove, I wish I were fit to ride again!"

"Get a decent animal next time, not a second edition of the chestnut. You had to shoot him, had you not?"

"Yes," said Alice, "he was shot, and it was I who had to tell Captain Ainsworth. I was so sorry, and I thought he would owe me quite a grudge for bringing him bad news of his favourite."

"That would hardly have been fair, Miss Percy. I was sorry to lose the horse, but the loss was lessened by your telling me of it."

Alice moved off the path and stooped to gather a piece of moss, and Ainsworth continued in a lower voice, "Yes, I was confoundedly annoyed about the horse, for I might have got a long price for him; as for caring for him——" an expressive shrug of the shoulders ended the sentence.

"Are you fond of horses, Miss Percy, or did you

regret the chestnut merely out of sympathy for its owner?" inquired Harcourt.

"I have had no horses to care for, but my old pony and I are on most intimate terms. I don't see how a rider can help liking the creature that obeys and serves him."

"But the chestnut didn't obey me, you see," said Ainsworth. "However, I don't complain, for if he had not run away with me I should not have had the great pleasure of knowing you so well."

The speaker, as if to show his power, threw into voice and manner far more than their usual meaning, and the shy eyes responded with a surprised gladness in which Harcourt read the confirmation of his suspicions.

"Just my luck," he thought, as he smoked his last cigar that night, "I always have been too late for everything, except when I got my V. C. in the mutiny. If I had been spilt in that run I might have won the heart of as nice a girl as ever I saw. Well, there's an end of that. I wonder if she'll think the Diver quite such a hero six months hence? I doubt it; he's not a bad fellow in his way; but, faith, I shouldn't like to be his wife. Perhaps, though, she'll keep her illusions, some women do, luckily for them and us. Heigho! I'd like to know if any woman will ever look up at me as that little girl did at Bob, when she bid him good night?"

CHAPTER III.

Is there within thy heart a need
That mine cannot fulfil?
One chord that any other hand
Could better wake or still?
Speak now, lest at some future day my whole life
wither and decay.

Couldst thou withdraw thy hand one day
And answer to my claim,
That Fate, and that to-day's mistake,
Not thou, had been to blame?
Some soothe their conscience thus: but thou wilt
surely warn and save me now.

A. PROCTOR.

CECIL's father, Sir Arthur Harcourt, was a worthy representative of one of the oldest English baronetcies. Soldier and courtier in his youth, he gave up his profession at his father's death, and, as the custom of the family was, became a hard-working country gentleman. He did not lose his taste for cultivated society, and Wynneburne Court was as well known to men of letters as its farm and prize-horses were to agriculturists. Sir Arthur had three sons, but the eldest was lost in a storm off the Norwegian coast, and Cecil was now the heir. He was the most like his father in tastes and disposition, and the old man could not but sympathise with him, even while he

regretted the roving spirit that made him remain in the army, leaving, as he himself said, his younger brother Jack to make friends with the farmers. Not that Cecil during his brief visits to the Court was unappreciated. He was a favourite wherever he went, and his friends, rich and poor, often wished he would find a wife and come home for good.

Perhaps it was indolence rather than any deeper motive that had hitherto prevented him from gratifying their desire. Of flirtations he had had his share, had fancied himself really in love more than once, but when matters were approaching the crisis, the regiment moved, the leave season began, or something intervened that cut the affair short. Sooth to say, he bore the decrees of Fate with a resignation that proved the wounds he had felt were but skin deep.

No one had pleased his fancy and his mind as much as Alice Percy, but he was too manly and too loyal to think of her further, seeing, as he did, how completely she had given her heart to Ainsworth.

These two men were opposites in almost everything, and their friendship was the result of circumstances. Schoolfellows at Harrow, they had gone together to Cheltenham, and been gazetted within a few weeks of each other to the same regiment.

They were both good sportsmen, and this similarity of taste, joined to the camaraderie of regimental

life, constituted a bond between them, in spite of the dissimilarity of their natures.

Ainsworth was an only child. His father, a man of bluff and imperious character, had made a large fortune out of a dyeing establishment, but had neither antecedents to fall back on, nor any great individual claim to respect. He tyrannised over his household as he did over his "hands," and terrible were the scenes that took place when he discovered that his son had a will as strong as his own, and a cooler head in using it.

Robert soon found out that a dread of committing any social solecism was one of his father's weak points, and even in his Harrow days used to extort large supplies of pocket-money on the ground that it would be thought the correct thing by some of his better-born companions.

There was nothing softening or elevating in the boy's home. Mrs. Ainsworth made jams, and lent her friends notable recipes for cakes; she mended all her son's socks, and sewed on his buttons herself. Her husband's extravagance was a continual grief to her, for he insisted on supplying her with endless new dresses, whereas her heart was set on turning her favourite claret-coloured silk. She never got over the sharp prohibition she received on this subject, nor could she understand why she might not so much as dye a bit of ribbon, "for the good of the house."

She read a part of the Bible daily, going steadily through the whole volume, for, as she said, one book in it was, no doubt, as learned as another. When she died, she was troubled with no doubts as to whether she had fulfilled the whole duty of woman, but she did wonder "who would keep the keys for Ainsworth, and he so masterful too." Poor meek soul, perhaps when she gave up those keys, a wider and tenderer life may have become possible for her.

Robert was sixteen then, and was at home for a few weeks, while passing from Harrow to Cheltenham. He missed the homely figure of his mother more than he had expected, and finding her spectacle-case in the big work-basket she had been wont to use, he surreptitiously carried it away, and locked it up in his desk.

A very few months at college, however, drove every lingering thought of her out of his head, and he was near being expelled for some senseless escapade, such as passed for wit with lads of his calibre.

At three and twenty his father desired him to marry an enormously wealthy Miss Sprot, whose fortune might be profitably invested in new dyes. As he flatly refused to comply, his allowance was stopped, and he was in considerable difficulties, when Cecil Harcourt, then a subaltern like himself, came to the

rescue, and undertook to act as ambassador to his father.

Good birth, good looks, and a suave manner ensured him, as Robert expected, tolerable success; but though Mr. Ainsworth agreed to drop the marriage scheme, neither then nor later would he give his son a settled allowance.

"Keep the reins in your own hands," he would say to his friends, when discussing similar matters; "ay, and the whip too; then you can always tighten the curb if the young 'uns get restive. That's the way I do with *my* son."

Under these circumstances, Harcourt was not surprised that when Ainsworth broached the subject of his intended marriage he asked for his friend's counsel and support.

A few days in the Hurlborough barracks after his recovery, convinced him, to his great surprise, that Alice had seriously impressed him. He was not wont to balk himself of any attainable pleasure, and having once acknowledged to himself that he missed her, his mind was made up without any of the doubts or hesitation that disturb most lovers. Not a day's leave was to be had after his prolonged absence, but he begged Harcourt to be the bearer of a letter to his father, and to add his persuasions should the old gentleman make any objections. The embassy was by no means to Cecil's taste, but he undertook it, fearing lest the refusal he at first meditated might

be due to a lingering selfishness that would have been against his code of honour.

He reached his destination just before dinner, and it was only when the servants were gone, and he found himself alone with his hard-featured host, that he fully realised his own dislike to the plan. That Alice Percy, with her dainty grace, should ever call this forbidding old man father, appeared little short of sacrilege. However, the time for hesitation was past, and already his silence was being misconstrued.

Mr. Ainsworth leant over the table, cracking walnuts, and peered under his bushy eyebrows at his guest.

"Out with it, sir! You and I know each other, so you needn't waste words. What confounded scrape has Robert got into now?"

For all reply Harcourt handed the letter, and knew it was far more for Alice's sake than for his friend's that he expressed a hope the contents would be satisfactory.

"Hm!—what's she like? Is she a real lady?—one of your well-bred ones, that wouldn't be afraid of a duchess?"

"She is a great favourite of Lady Mary Courtenay's, if that counts for anything."

"A favourite! That sounds good. But look here, she's not too fashionable, is she? I'll have no stuck-up notions here, nor fast ones either."

"Mr. Ainsworth, she is a young lady whom any mother or any gentleman might be proud to call daughter. I don't think I need say more of her. Robert begged me to bring that letter, though the post would have done it as well, and if you choose to entrust me with any message, I will take it."

"I'm glad you came. The post wouldn't have done as well. D'ye think I'd have taken Robert's word as to the girl, when he wants to marry her? A pretty husband he'll make! As to the money, I'll do something for him, of course. Here, draw your chair in, and tell me what your regiment costs a man after he's married."

Thankful to get upon this ground, Harcourt answered his host's minute questions to the best of his power, and returned to Hurlborough next day, carrying a letter in which Captain Ainsworth was assured that his father would use him well in the matter of settlements. It only remained for him to make in form a proposal the acceptance of which he never doubted.

Meantime, the inmates of the Red Hall fared badly after their guest's departure. The Squire and his sister would glance anxiously at each other now and again, each seeking to find out if the other divined how much was amiss with their treasure.

Alice was experiencing her first trial in life, and for a while she completely succumbed. Her one impulse was to fly to her beloved pine-wood, and

there she would hide herself for hours, returning home chilled and weary.

One grey and showery afternoon she went out as usual, and Mrs. Ramsay sat in solitude longing for her return. Once or twice she stirred the fire to a cheerier blaze, and went uneasily to the window to watch. At last, wrapping herself up, she slowly climbed the steep path, determined to put an end to this state of things. She found Alice seated on a lichen-covered rock, gazing listlessly at the scudding rain-clouds in the glen below. A flush, half of annoyance, half of shame, rose to her cheeks as she sprang up at her aunt's approach.

"What has brought you out so late, Auntie?—it is far too cold for you to-day."

"You brought me, Alice, and you must take me home again, for I am not fit for this weather, nor you either. Child, have you no thought for your father and me, that you sit moping here in this senseless fashion?"

Never had Alice heard such a tone from her gentle aunt before, and with a quick compunction she drew the old lady's arm through her own, and the two went silently home.

Seated again in her wonted place, Mrs. Ramsay called Alice to a stool at her feet, where she had poured out many a childish trouble, and began her task.

"Now, my bairn, sit down there, and take the

sorrow out of your heart and look at it. Trust me, a trouble fairly faced is a trouble half conquered. Shirk it, and it grows as big and vague as the bogies children think they see in dark corners. Light up the corners, and though real shadows remain, bogies vanish."

The girl winced, as she replied with tears in her voice,

"You are hard to me to-day, Auntie, why do you speak to me in that way?"

"Because you need a tonic, Alice, and you know it. Do you want all the folk about the Hall to say that Alice Percy is breaking her heart for a man that doesn't care for her?"

"Aunt Jane! you are cruel!" sobbed Alice, hiding her face.

"Poor child, poor child! There's only pity in my heart for you; but, darling, I have tried in vain to rouse you, and now I must speak out. You must learn a woman's great lesson, dear, to live bravely and do your duty cheerfully, however your heart may ache. We are all Spartans at some time or other."

"Surely there are happy women—who are loved."

"Yes, some; I don't deny the glory of love, dear, and at your age it seems to be all that is wanted. You see only the bright sunrise, while I am thinking of the burden and heat of the day. Want of love is sad, dear, but love's often sadder. However, you'll

not believe that, and the question is—how to make the best of your life as it is?"

"I know I have been very wrong, Auntie, but I can't help feeling lazy and dull. I want to be alone, and the house is, oh, so empty."

"And do you want your father to grieve and reproach himself for having done what at the time seemed so right and kind? He wishes now that he had sent Captain Ainsworth to Hazelshaugh, or even to one of the farms."

"Oh, Auntie, I never thought of that. I didn't know father had noticed me. How silly I have been!"

"No sillier than many young things, dear," said Mrs. Ramsay, who was longing to comfort rather than to blame. "Love only sees himself from his own standpoint, try now to look at him with other people's eyes."

"I will," said Alice, and, her courage once roused, she kept her word bravely, and felt her burden growing lighter, till the time came that she laid it down, to take it up again, had she but known it, in another form.

It was by the evening post that a large packet came for the Squire, the perusal of which seemed greatly to disturb him.

"Jane, come to the library, I must talk this over with you," he exclaimed, and went away hurriedly, leaving Alice surprised and uneasy. "Here's that

fellow actually proposing for Alice! What on earth am I to say?" began the Squire.

"It is the thing on which her heart is set," replied Mrs. Ramsay quietly.

"Why, you don't mean to say I am to allow it!" cried her brother.

"I fear you must, unless you find there is anything against him. They love each other, you see."

"Good Lord! What the child can see in him—my pretty Alice—how she, her mother's daughter, can care for him, I cannot imagine."

"Nor I altogether. But what we think commonplace she admires, and we cannot say no because we are not in love with him."

"You don't think she'd get over it; girls do, you know."

"Being your daughter and Alice's, I think not. She is not one to change. We are growing old, brother, and what we would choose for her is not what she wants."

"Hm! I daresay. But experience is worth something. We were both old fools for not seeing what was going on, but the idea of her caring for such an empty-headed fellow as that never crossed my mind."

"Ah, Harry, it is I who am more to blame. You don't know how I have reproached myself; but, like you, I never thought of it till it was too late."

"Well, well, my dear, it is no use grieving. After

all, we could not have shut her up while the man was here, and it certainly was the right thing to bring him. But how about his going abroad with the regiment?—it is losing the child for years."

"Don't object to his profession, whatever you do! Why, it is the cloth that makes the man. Captain Ainsworth is nothing if he isn't a soldier," said Mrs. Ramsay abruptly, and then regretted her speech.

Her brother shook his head sadly.

"That's a sad estimate of one's future son-in-law. But it's out of our hands now, as you say. He writes a gentlemanly letter. After all, I don't exactly know what I find fault with."

"There must be some good in him, or Captain Harcourt would not be a friend of his."

"Ay! There's the right stuff, eh, Jane? I wish it had been him."

"So do I heartily."

"Well, I suppose I must give the child her letter; he encloses it to me. Dear, dear, this is very unlike what I had wished for her."

Slowly and sadly the two returned to the drawing-room, and the Squire called his daughter to him.

"Here's a letter for you, child, your first love-letter, I fancy. You had better take it to your own room to read. I suppose I must let you have your way, my poor little daughter!"

There was no need to explain who was the writer

of the epistle; startled, but with a radiant happiness on her face, Alice allowed her father and aunt to kiss her, without attempting to speak, and fled away to enjoy a delight that never comes twice in a lifetime.

In due time Ainsworth arrived at the Hall, and the question of settlements had to be discussed. Very great was his disappointment when he found that Alice was not the heiress he had supposed her to be, and some indication of this feeling betrayed itself on his face.

Mr. Percy, who was in a degree reconciled to the match, observed the look, and with characteristic impetuosity spoke his thoughts somewhat too frankly. For one base moment Ainsworth—always changeable—felt inclined to make the tone of the other's remarks an excuse for withdrawal, but prudence and his better nature reasserted themselves, and he contrived to reply in a manner that forced the Squire to make a reluctant apology.

Alice never knew how nearly her romance had made shipwreck on that day.

Old Mr. Ainsworth was furious when he heard of the entail, and appealed to Captain Harcourt to know whether his son had not been "taken in." Cecil was by this time well aware how deeply Miss Percy's happiness was implicated, and he exerted all his skill to soothe the old man's anger. After a while he persuaded him that the world would blame

him severely did he refuse his consent to his son's marriage, but nothing would induce him to fulfil all his previous promises, and the young couple were forced to begin life on a very moderate allowance.

CHAPTER IV.

Roses are her cheeks,
And a rose her mouth.
TENNYSON.

ROSES in the trim flower-beds in front of the Hall; roses scenting the pretty drawing-room where the wedding presents were displayed; roses on the laden tables in the dining-room; roses in the hands of the school-children, on the bridesmaids' dresses, and on the bride's fair face, as she passed out of the little church, and down the pathway that was flushed with showered blossoms.

It was a pretty wedding, the guests said, and while Ainsworth's friends were surprised, most of them had the sense to be delighted with the hearty and homely ways of this remote region.

The bridegroom's father, silently observant, was well satisfied with the rank of the guests, and was shrewd enough to see that he was the only person who was astonished when the bride went into the entrance-hall to kiss the aged mother of one of the tenants.

"It was like a bit out of a novel," said one of the —th, when describing the ceremony at Mess, "I never saw the like anywhere. The Percys must be

a remarkable lot, for they don't seem either particularly rich or particularly clever, yet the whole neighbourhood turned out. At the ball, the tenants and people treated the Squire, as they call him, like a sort of patriarch."

"And is the daughter as popular?"

"Quite. I couldn't say whether she was most fervently blessed by Lady Mary Courtenay, or by a stout old woman whose family had been on the estate for generations."

"Will she do for knocking about with the regiment, or will she make the Diver leave the service?"

"Shouldn't think she'd *make* him do anything, I fancy she has a good deal to learn."

She had, indeed, and the lessons were soon begun. Perhaps it was quite natural that, as the newly-married pair drove away from the Hall, the bridegroom should be occupied solely with comments on his own behaviour during the ceremony. Still the bride, while she listened, was conscious of a slight chill, as though a single large drop of rain had fallen on her from a summer sky, and as she leant out for a last look at her happy home, she asked herself, half fearfully, "How shall I feel before I see the dear old place again?" The honeymoon was brief, chiefly in consequence of certain remarks of her aunt's, that kept Alice from seeking to prolong it.

"My dear," Mrs. Ramsay had said, "you mustn't expect to find all men like your good father. When they're young they're fidgety. A young man reminds me of a kettle full of boiling water; the steam must get out, and if the spout is stopped it'll knock the lid off. Work and exercise are the spout, so if a man's kept too long honeymooning, there will be a blow up of some kind."

"I will try to be reasonable, Auntie, and stop short of that catastrophe."

"And remember, child, never try to tie your husband to your apron-strings, you and he will both be worn out if you do, and the strings will break in the end."

"I hope, though, Auntie, that apron-strings will not be needed to keep Robert often with me," smiled Alice.

"Well, well, we shall see. I hope you're right, but soldiers take more kindly to controlling others than to being controlled. I saw enough of them once, and my experience was that most of them put the regiment first, themselves next, and the wife last."

"Poor Auntie!" exclaimed the girl, who knew that Mrs. Ramsay's life had been a sad one, and who felt at that moment the boundless pity of a young creature that contrasts another's clouded lot with the prospective brightness of which she herself feels assured.

"I hope," she continued, "that all soldiers are not so bad; I know my particular one is not."

"Nevertheless, remember your old aunt's words. They may comfort you some day. It is always good to know that one's luck is not worse than other people's. And there's a deal of cheery friendliness in soldiers too, when you can get rid of the chaff. I'd trust Captain Harcourt, for instance, if I needed a friend. Now I'll croak no more, lest Robert find you looking serious."

Mindful of this advice, Alice was content to begin a round of visits, after a very short absence at the Lakes, and one or two of them she thoroughly enjoyed.

It was pleasant to be at Hazelshaugh, rambling about with Ethel Philips, a merry girl of barely seventeen, who had been one of Alice's bridesmaids, and insisted that her appearance at the wedding ball was equivalent to coming out.

It was pleasant to drive over to the Hall, and be received with open arms, to find all her tastes consulted, her favourite flowers arranged for her, her favourite dishes on the table, and the whole household devoted to her.

She only remained there two days, but even Ainsworth's nonchalance could not repress her brimming delight, nor could he refuse to stroll with her through the paths that were to her Arcadia. She did not analyse her happiness, nor question

how much of it was due to the sight of the dear faces in her home.

Her stay at Courtenay Dene was less satisfactory. Lady Mary was as charming as ever, Lord Courtenay as talkative and kind. She did not see that her husband had offended in any way, yet she felt instinctively that he had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. She knew that her friends pitied her, and, what was worse, the knowledge did not rouse in her any indignation, while Lady Mary's earnest hope that she might be happy made her shiver as though she had a presage of coming evil.

At some houses she found her bridal honours rather oppressive, and was demurely amused when stately dowagers talked to her after dinner of family affairs. Had they quite forgotten their youth, she wondered, or had they taken this initiation gladly in their own day? Would it be very undignified if she were to join the younger guests making merry at the far end of the room? Dignified or not, her courage usually failed when the chance of escape came, and she would sit on, longing for the gentlemen to come and release her, or at least put a stop to these feminine mysteries. To one visit she looked forward with especial dread. Her husband had spoken so disparagingly of his own home that as they drove up the short avenue to the Beeches Alice's heart beat fast. Outside, the house was

less gloomy than she had expected, and the two trees from which it took its name shaded a tiny lawn that would have been pretty but for the stiff walks and stiffer standard roses that surrounded it. Inside, everything was large, solid, and expensive. Even the housekeeper was of so imposing a presence that the little bride felt awed, until, on reaching her room, the old woman took her hands, and, in a voice husky with genuine emotion, bid her welcome.

"You'll forgive me speaking so free, ma'am, but the sight of a young thing is like light in the house, and I've known Captain Robert all his life, and I wish his poor mother had been here to see you this day."

"I wish she had, Mrs. Brown," said Alice, with a sudden longing. "Mine died when I was a child, and oh, I wish I had known Robert's mother!"

"Bless you, my dear, she'd have loved you like her own. She was a good lady about the house, was Madam Ainsworth. You come with me, and I'll show you such a linen-press as you don't see every day. I've kept it well, I'll say that for myself."

Alice enjoyed turning over these treasures that were to be Robert's—she hardly thought of them yet as hers; and when she met her father-in-law before dinner, her fears were lessened and her heart softened by Mrs. Brown's loquacious talk.

They were to dine alone this first evening, and the sight of the pretty figure in a tasteful summer dress roused even Mr. Ainsworth to something like cordiality.

"I hope you'll be comfortable here, Alice," said he. "It's a dull house for a young lady like you, and I have no one belonging to me to entertain you; but we'll do our best for you."

The forlornness of the whole place, and the solitariness of this stern, reserved man, touched Alice to the quick. Forgetting her husband's warnings as to her conduct, she threw her arms round her father-in-law's neck and kissed him. There was a moment of unfeigned surprise on his part, and dismay on that of his son; then the old man laid his hand for an instant on the fair head, and saying, "You have a kind heart, child," led her in to dinner without further remark.

"Well," observed the husband, when they were alone that night, "you have got on capitally, I must say, but it is the most extraordinary fluke. What possessed you to kiss my father after I had told you how he hated it?"

"I couldn't help it, Robert—he looked so lonely," pleaded Alice.

"He never looked anything else that I remember. Good heavens! it's laughable now, but I thought you had done for both of us. I can't imagine anyone ever using him so unceremoniously before."

"Poor man!"

"That's all very fine, but you must be careful to-morrow night. I tell you every soul that is coming will criticise what you wear, and say, and do, and if you offend anybody, there will be the deuce to pay, and I shall get into hot water."

"Robert, you really should not talk to me like that," replied Alice, with some spirit in her tone.

"And why not, pray?"

"Because you make me nervous and miserable. I can't pretend to be anything I am not, nor can I help it if people do not like me. As to behaviour, as long as I do nothing a lady should not do, no one has a right to complain."

"Whew! you needn't make a fuss. I hate temper. I am only warning you, and I think you might be obliged to me. It's for your interest as well as mine to keep my father in a good humour."

"I don't want to make a fuss, Robert dear," was the gentle reply, "only I shall get on much better if you say less to me about it."

Alice did not sleep till late that night, for there was a shadow on her peace. This was not the first time she had felt herself subject to a criticism most unlike the affectionate discrimination to which she had been accustomed, nor could she conceal from herself that the standard by which she was judged now was lower, as well as the manner of judging less tender, than at the Hall.

The dinner-party on the following evening, was of the ponderous and costly order, both as to plate and food. For guests there were successful merchants, with bald heads and heavy watch chains, men of weight, to whom business is what ozone is to certain other people.

There were also the merchants' wives, testifying to success in their silks of gorgeous make and richness, and their wealth of diamonds enhanced by much gold setting.

Two of these dames brought daughters, slimmer copies of their mothers, damsels who were authorities on questions of gentility, and held decided views as to matrimony, though they had not settled whether they could ever be brought to marry commoners. Two shy young men completed the party; they were invited on account of the damsels aforesaid, but fate used them hardly, for not being yet successful, the young ladies snubbed them, and the rest of the guests accounted them of very little worth.

The only person who spoke with any kindliness to them was Alice, who pitied their awkwardness, and was rewarded by a dumb admiration.

Very lovely she looked, as she sat at the head of the table in her pure wedding-dress, her sole ornament the pearl necklace that had been her mother's. Only the slight flush on her face betrayed her nervousness, and ere the fish was off the table,

even her husband's anxious glance perceived that she had taken his father's guests by storm. Her gentle courtesy was felt by them all, as something of which it was impossible to be jealous, and which it was equally impossible not to admire.

Even the young ladies were conquered.

"She really is pretty, Bella," said one of them after dinner, "though she is so very quiet, poor thing. I almost think I could copy that skirt, it is something quite new."

"You ought to, Jemima, for you've never taken your eyes off it. As for me, I think I could really make a friend of Mrs. Ainsworth, she looks as if she would understand one."

It was a fatiguing evening for Alice, anxious as she was to please, yet feeling that she had no topics in common with her guests; but she was rewarded for her exertions when they had departed, and her father-in-law thanked her with a heartiness that surprised himself, for the way in which she had received his old friends.

As it wanted only two months of the time when the regiment would go to Ireland, the Ainsworths did not care to establish themselves in Hurlborough. To Alice's unfeigned satisfaction, it was decided that she should return home at the expiration of her husband's leave, and that he should resume his bachelor quarters for the weeks that remained.

It was in September that she reached the Hall,

the month that, in the hill country, is rich in embrowning purples and creamy gold.

As soon as she could do so, Alice stole away to the fir-wood, and kneeling among the glistening bracken, felt a tightening at her throat as she looked across the glorious glen.

The old view, the old lights and shades, changefully the same, but the girl that watched them—ah, the change in her, seemed to be fast destroying her old self.

As the thought crossed her mind, the shadow of a great cloud swept across the sunniest part of the landscape, and Alice shivered as she saw it. And yet, she could tell her father and her more keen-eyed aunt that she was happy, very happy indeed. Of course things were not quite what she had fancied, but her fancies had been childish, and no doubt she would think the realities better by-and-by. Only—what was it she missed, and why did she realise the want now, when she found herself face to face with the country she so loved? Surely this was mere home sickness, nonsense that Alice Ainsworth must repress, as Alice Percy had repressed certain other thoughts long ago.

She would not go up to the Scaur; no, she would hurry home and read to Aunt Jane.

And so ended the wife's first walk alone in the Red Glen.

CHAPTER V.

"But had I wist before I kist
That love had been sae ill to win,
I'd have locked my heart in a case o' gowd
And pinned it wi' a siller pin.

But had I kenned or I came frae hame
How thou unkind wad'st been to me,
I would have kept my border-side
In spite of all thy peers and thee."

DUBLIN in November! Mud at the quays, and mud in the streets, mud stickier and more slippery than in any other city.

Grey skies, a drizzling rain, and a long waiting in the cold raw morning, before the door of their lodgings was open to them. These were Alice's earliest impressions of her new home.

Her husband had obtained leave in order to fetch her, and a brother officer had taken rooms for them, but the shy gladness with which Alice set out was well-nigh dispelled ere the end of the journey. Soldier though he was, Ainsworth hated travelling, and his wife's inexperience made her rather a charge. Affairs did not improve when they got into their abode, the newly-lit fire would not burn, a sense of damp pervaded every corner, and a genuine Irish maid-of-all-work answered the bell. Her calm

disregard of order and cleanliness, her extraordinary deshabille, and her unblushing excuses, made Ainsworth shudder, and filled his wife with dismay.

Nevertheless she took her place at breakfast with a smile on her face.

"How strange it seems, Robert, to see you sit down opposite to me in uniform. I feel I am beginning soldiering in earnest."

"I call this campaigning in earnest," replied Ainsworth, as he uncovered a dish of cindrous-looking ham and eggs. "Bah! I can't eat that stuff. I shall breakfast at Mess. What will you do?"

"Eat what I can, and leave the rest, I suppose."

"You had better look for other lodgings. What can have possessed Redmayne and his wife to take these?"

"But, Robert, won't you come? I don't know the way, nor how to choose lodgings!"

"As I was only here two nights before I went for you, I don't know the place either, so I can't help you. I told you I should be away almost all day. I'll lunch at Mess, and you must try to get something decent for dinner. Go out and look for notices of rooms to let. Good-bye. I shall be late for parade unless I'm off."

Alice seemed so thoroughly bewildered, that her husband turned back to give her a careless kiss, and say,

"I'm sorry for you, Allie, but it's all part of soldiering."

The sweet face brightened at once, and those few kind words cheered the fluttering little heart through the long day, but Alice never forgot her experience in that house. First, she had to see the landlady, imposing in black silk and spotless apron, who supposed Mrs. Ainsworth would take four pints of milk, as that, at least, was what Lady Robinson took, who always stayed in those rooms. (Lady Robinson had three children.)

Then came luncheon, with an experiment in puddings, meant as a rehearsal for dinner. The afternoon was spent in an unsuccessful search for rooms, and Alice was worn out by dinner time. She had provided herself with some pastry for that meal, rather than repeat the pudding.

Late on the following afternoon, her husband brought the welcome news that he had heard of good lodgings from an old acquaintance whom he met by chance, and that he had secured them from the next day.

This made the second evening more endurable, and Alice packed up again gladly, Ainsworth undertaking to see the luggage moved and pay the bill. They subsequently heard that their quondam landlady was an ex-lady'smaid, innocent of cookery, but she appeared to thrive on the week's rent paid by victims who left in hot haste.

Now opened before Alice's eyes the new world of a garrison town, with its mixed society, cliques, gossip, and stir.

Among the callers who poured in upon her came Mrs. Redmayne, her motherly soul sorely vexed at her mistaken choice of rooms. The readiness with which her apologies were accepted increased her friendliness, and after giving sundry useful hints as to housekeeping, she asked Alice to come with her to the winter garden to hear the band.

"But my husband may come in."

"Or he may not. My dear, you can't stay in for him every day, or you'll make yourself ill for want of exercise. Soldiers' wives have to be a little independent. Besides, your husband won't be in, for he's off with mine to the racquet court."

"He never told me he was going!"

"Very likely he didn't know before he left this morning," *said* Mrs. Redmayne, and *thought*, "that's almost a fib, for I'm pretty sure Dick and he settled it yesterday, but it can't be helped."

"They all begin planning things together," she continued, "and you wouldn't like the officers to say your husband's henpecked if he doesn't join them. That's what my Dick used to tell me, and it's good sense."

"I daresay it is. Mrs. Redmayne, I should never have thought of that. I fancied officers went about with their wives like other people," said Alice, with

unconscious irony. "You must help me not to make mistakes."

"That I will. Now get your bonnet on. I declare you are half-moped already."

"I am not accustomed to a town, you see, I cannot bear the streets, and I feel choked for want of air. But I shall grow used to it."

The winter garden was a very fine one, and the ladies strolled up and down, looking at the crowd in the intervals of the music.

"Have any of the regiment called on you yet?" inquired Mrs. Redmayne.

"Some of them. Those two standing talking there came together."

"Of course. They are so inseparable they are called Light and Shade, not bad nicknames for Summer and Knyghte."

"Less curious than usual, I think. Is that disagreeable-looking man with the red hair another of the —th?"

"Yes; that is Major Bellaire, and you are right in saying he is disagreeable. He sneers at everything and everybody, and cares for nothing in heaven or earth but himself."

The three gentlemen were facing the ladies as they advanced. They kept their places till the latter were almost close to them, then the two whom Alice knew, turned their backs upon her, while the third

stared at her rudely as she passed. Mrs. Redmayne saw her face crimson, and turned off to a side walk.

"Never mind them, my dear, though that is as cool a thing as ever I saw. After all they come off worst, for they lose their gentlemanliness, while we only lose their greeting—no severe loss."

"But what have I done that they should behave so to me?"

"You! I'll tell you. You've married one of the —th. You may well look puzzled; but you don't know their ways yet. Two or three of them were acquaintances of mine before I married, and one of them took the trouble to tell me that he would not be able to call on me afterwards, as he made a point of never calling on a brother officer's wife."

"I never heard anything so extraordinary. Wasn't he a gentleman?"

"He thought himself a very perfect one. Sit down here, and I'll tell you about it all."

The bench Mrs. Redmayne chose faced a door to the outer garden, and a stream of people passed in and out.

Among them came Captain Harcourt, who, seeing the ladies in deep conference, remained near, so as to join them when they rose.

Also, accompanied by two or three noisy cavalry officers, Maud Brabazon swept by, and thought it was because of Mrs. Ainsworth's neighbourhood that

her old acquaintance only vouchsafed her a distant bow.

"You have heard of Colonel Stone?" began Mrs. Redmayne. "He was a woman-hater, and set his face against an officer marrying. He brought about the rule that anyone doing so must pay a heavy fine to the Mess. If a rich cousin hadn't paid Dick's, I don't know what we should have done. Of course, when a thing is regimental custom, everyone takes it up, whether it is sense or nonsense, and so it became the fashion to slight any unlucky lady who married one of the —th. They went too far for Dick's patience once, and one of them had to apologise for a piece of discourtesy to me."

"What was it?"

"Oh! I won't rake up an old story. I merely mentioned it to show that you were not the only victim. Luckily, Colonel Stone has gone to his own place. I don't mean that he's dead, but gone to some Irish bog, where, if he tyrannises over his tenants, as he did over his regiment, I should think he will be shot some day. Colonel Berkely is different; but the old manners will last awhile."

"Surely neither Major Martyn nor Captain Harcourt ever behaved in that sort of way?"

"Certainly not. Dear old Major Martyn couldn't do an unkind thing if he tried, and as for the other, I never can understand how he stays in the —th.

He joined it because some of his family had been in it."

"He was our best man, you know, and always seemed so pleasant."

"He has what I call a wholesome nature. He never sneers, and never swaggers, two things of which one sees more than enough. There he is; I will tell him those two young gentlemen need a lesson in the 'art of deportment.'"

It is probable that the needful teaching was administered in some form or other, for when next Mrs. Ainsworth met the culprits, they bowed profoundly. They had not meant much harm, but had blundered, as youths do to whom one leader seems about as good as another.

When Alice looked back to this part of her life, it seemed to her that she had undergone a process of crystallisation.

Hardly a day passed without the occurrence of some trifling incident that affected her whole mode of thought, repressing her impulses, and showing her human nature in the cold light of reality. She had the frank demonstrativeness of a child to those she loved, and at first would sit down of an evening on a stool at her husband's feet, as she had done of old at her father's. She did not do so often—the difference was too marked. She missed the caressing hand on her head, the kindly eyes, the "Well, dar-

ling, what news to-night?" with which the Squire welcomed her.

Ainsworth had not a particle of graciousness in his character. The studied attentions of the lover were undreamt of by the husband, and as he silently smoked his after-dinner cheroot, his motionless indifference was equivalent to a repulse. He did not deliberately intend to be unkind, yet the crystallising process progressed rapidly under this treatment.

Surely a day will come when dull hearts, that are guilty of negative cruelty of this sort, shall be called to account. Sometimes, too, he did not return home till dinner, and after eating his meal in comparative silence, would fall asleep in his arm-chair. No wonder time hung heavy on hand with his wife, and that she grew to regard her drawing-room as a prison-house, and longed wildly for the unrestrained rambles and pleasant intercourse of her home life.

Even solitude, however, was preferable to some society, as she found one afternoon when Major Bellaire called upon her. His supercilious familiarity disgusted her, and made her angry with herself because she knew not how to show her resentment. She allowed the conversation to flag, answering him in monosyllables, and he soon rose.

As he did so, he remarked, with a mocking look in his blue eyes—

"I suppose the Diver doesn't come home as

regularly as he did at first, does he?—stays out a little, eh?"

The taunt stung, and the smothered indignation leapt to Alice's face as she replied—

"My husband comes when it suits us both. Good morning."

Hardly had she recovered her equanimity when a fresh visitor appeared in the person of Mrs. O'Leary, a tall, showily-dressed lady, full of gossip, which she called news.

Alice, listening with what patience she might to stories of people she did not know, was thankful to see her husband and Captain Harcourt enter. Mrs. O'Leary greeted them with effusion, and instantly asked where they had been spending the afternoon.

"I've been last in Grafton Street, where I met my ideal woman," answered Ainsworth.

"Dear me! How do you like that, Mrs. Ainsworth? I shouldn't allow my husband to say such a thing."

"I don't wish to rule mine, you see," said Alice, bravely, though she clasped her hands involuntarily tighter over the fancy-work on her knee. Harcourt came to the rescue.

"He forgets, Mrs. Ainsworth, that ideals are unrealisable, so the fact of his seeing this lady robs her of the title."

"Eh, what's that? Don't talk stuff, Cecil. The lady's a very substantial ideal, I can tell you."

"And may one ask who this interesting person is, or is that an unfair question?" inquired Mrs. O'Leary, whose keen Irish eyes were making rapid notes.

"She's a Mrs. Brabazon, wife of——"

"Mrs. Brabazon!" echoed Alice, surprised.

"Why, what do you know of her?"

"I saw her that day at Hazelshaugh, and very handsome she is too."

"By Jove! you're right, Alice, and you shall make her acquaintance."

"Dear me! this is delightful!" laughed the visitor. "I always thought Mrs. Brabazon was—ah, well—a little *prononcée*, you know. But, of course, if you are going to take Mrs. Ainsworth there, the world must be wrong. I must make acquaintance, too, with your 'ideal.' Perhaps we may meet at her house. Good-bye, *dear* Mrs. Ainsworth."

"Confound that woman, what a tongue she has!" said Ainsworth, as he shut the door; but neither of the others replied, and after a few minutes' chat, Harcourt took his leave, sure that Alice would gladly be alone.

She, hurt and annoyed, debated whether she should allude to what had passed, knew that she was afraid to do so, and shrank yet more from the consciousness of her own fear. With an effort, after dinner, she began—

"Don't go to sleep for five minutes, Robert, I want to tell you what Major Bellaire said to-day."

"Well, what was it—anything amusing?"

"I did not find it so," said she, and described the look and tone that had added point to the remark that vexed her.

If she expected sympathy she was disappointed, for all the answer that she received was a sleepy grunt.

"Robert!" she exclaimed, "don't you care one bit how I get on? I do think the ——th are so ill-mannered, I shall hate them soon!"

"Then you'll be a fool!" said Ainsworth, waking up when the regiment was attacked. "If you'd learn the ways of the world and not make mountains out of mole-hills, you'd get on better. Oh come, Alice, if you're going to cry, I shall go to the club. I can't stand tears."

"Don't be afraid, I shall not disturb you; I am going upstairs for some work."

She left the room slowly, but safely locked into her own, she sobbed passionately, quietly too, that she might not be heard.

Long after, when she stole downstairs for some tea, she found, as she expected and hoped, her husband sound asleep, so that she crept to bed unobserved.

"What are you going to do to-day, Bob?" asked Harcourt, after parade next morning.

"Going to the band. My wife's to meet me there, to be introduced to Mrs. Brabazon."

"Not really?"

"Really; why not? You forget they were both at Hazelshaugh," was the reply in a defiant tone.

"Everybody goes to a meet. Besides, the Philipses didn't know her as well as anyone in the garrison does. I know I'd be sorry to see any of my womankind going about with her."

"You seem deuced hot about it. When did you grow so particular?"

"Always was on that subject. Besides, Maud isn't improving by any means. Her husband's getting up whist parties again. Come, Bob, you know it as well as I do."

"I know nothing about it, except that she's the handsomest and wittiest woman in Dublin, and if Alice picks up a trifle of her style, she'll be none the worse."

"The Lord forbid!" said Harcourt to himself, turning away and resolving that he too would hear the band.

Ill luck seemed to pursue Alice in whatever she did or left undone. Conscious in a vague way that her courage was about to be tried, she dressed herself with great care that afternoon, and entered the garden with more than her usual self-possession.

Nothing so fortifies a woman as the knowledge that she is looking her best.

At the gateway Fate bore down upon her in the person of Mrs. O'Gorman, one of her new acquaintances. Stout, high-coloured, loud-voiced, she was at any time to be avoided, but more especially to-day, for her brilliant purple silk made Alice's delicate blue and grey look sickly.

Moreover she was accompanied, or, more properly, surrounded, by her three daughters, who, though better dressed, were still calculated to strike all beholders. "My Blanche, my Helena, and my little Rosie," were as well known as the shrubs in St. Stephen's Green, or any other perennial ornaments of the city.

"Ah! Mrs. Ainsworth, I'm delighted to see ye, and so are the girls. Are ye goin' to the band? But of course ye are, and I'll be glad to take ye in with me. Will there be many of yer friends there, do you think?"

"I don't know," said Alice. "I think I'll take a turn in the garden. Don't let me keep you."

"Shure, it's all the same, only what would ye be going round the garden for, with the music going on, and all the people inside? And there's the Madeleine Waltz, too, that makes me long to be dancin' again myself. Ye'd better come in with me and the girls, me dear, and I daresay you'll find somebody ye know."

There was no escape, and with a desperate hope that her husband might not have arrived, Alice went in, vainly trying to edge away from the rest of the party. Opposite the door, as though waiting for her, stood Mrs. Brabazon and Ainsworth, and she felt the repressed smile on the one face, and the annoyance on the other, as they saw her companions. Captain Harcourt and Mr. Barron, one of the —th, who had been at her marriage, were not far off, and her courage rose.

"There is my husband, Mrs. O'Gorman, I shall join him."

"Of course; and I'll speak to him too. Who is that tall man over there? — he's one of your regiment, isn't he? You might introduce me, me dear."

Alice walked straight up to her husband, and said quietly,

"Are you early, or am I late, Robert? I daresay I may be. Mrs. O'Gorman detained me at the door."

Ainsworth made some indistinct reply, introduced his wife to Mrs. Brabazon, and bowed to Mrs. O'Gorman with a stiffness that chilled even her. She hung on, however, in the hope of joining in the conversation, for she was always unwearied and undaunted in her campaigning on "the girls'" behalf.

Harcourt and Barron coming forward, the former remarked, rather distinctly, as he shook hands with Alice,

"If you want to see your friends, you had better move down the building—all the world is congregating at the further end."

"The music sounds better here, I think," she answered simply, but was relieved when Mrs. O'Gorman exclaimed,

"I'll bid ye good-bye for the present, Mrs. Ainsworth, for I think I see a friend I've been looking for. I daresay we'll meet again, and you must come some day to my little house, ye're always welcome, and anyone ye like to bring."

"Very neatly done, Captain Harcourt," said Mrs. Brabazon, as the purple silk sailed away. "Your strategy is admirable."

"Thanks. I thought you'd all be grateful. Your incumbrance has gone to look for 'all the world' at the other end, Mrs. Ainsworth."

"Oh, I see," said Alice, laughing, "poor Mrs. O'Gorman, she is certainly very terrible."

"What the deuce made you come in with her, Alice? The idea of going about with a woman like that is too awful," said Ainsworth, sharply.

"You might have been able to dismiss her, Robert; but I couldn't. I tried to stay in the garden, but she offered to walk there, too. That would have been worse, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose you were too polite to her at first, or she couldn't have done it."

"I'm afraid, Robert, they didn't teach impolite-

ness in Westmoreland. I daresay I could learn it here. Don't you think so, Mrs. Brabazon?"

Perhaps no one was more surprised than Alice herself at this speech; but something in Maud's face roused a spirit of defiance she had never felt before. Unhappily, the flash of her eyes made her remark appear an ebullition of temper, instead of a well-merited rebuke, and Maud, though she respected her for the first time, acted a well-bred astonishment, and answered, as though soothing a child,

"I daresay you could find teachers. Of course there are ill-regulated people everywhere. Have you seen the programme?"

"No," and Alice moved away to see it, followed by her husband, while Mr. Barron, who did not enjoy these passages of arms, joined some other acquaintances. Instantly Maud turned to Harcourt.

"You seem to be taking great interest in our *ingénue*. It is a new *rôle* for you."

"You mean that a real *ingénue* is new. I always liked variety," he replied, hating the speaker and the topic, but suspecting that he had better not quarrel with either.

"I really believe an idiot would attract men, if there were but one in the world."

"Wouldn't the men be idiots if they didn't go to see such a rarity? You would be the first to say so."

"Yes, you score there. You think her very pretty, I suppose," indicating Alice.

"Yes, I do. And to another woman that is unforgiveable, isn't it?"

Another score; Harcourt remembered that this particular woman liked to be thought magnanimous to her sex.

"Not to me. I allow the prettiness, and even grace, but I suppose I judge others by myself. To me, good looks are nothing without *savoir-faire* and style. They are the seasoning of society, the finish on the raw material. Without them a pretty woman is *fade*, and a handsome man is a bear."

"Alas! I have the bad taste to prefer the raw material sometimes, even at the risk of being included among the brutes."

"Shall I say the worse for you, or the better for the brutes?"

"You are certain to say what suits the case best," replied Harcourt, who hoped by a timely compliment to divert a fresh attack. He succeeded, for Maud, apparently satisfied, joined the Ainsworths, and the conversation became general.

It pleased him to see how Alice drew away from the growing circle of Mrs. Brabazon's friends, and what scant attention she bestowed on one or two of them who requested an introduction. The two women were sufficiently remarkable to attract a good deal of notice, and one lady described them

aptly when she compared them to a wild rose and a Guernsey lily.

Before leaving the garden, Mrs. Brabazon turned to Alice with her finest smile.

"I have always a few friends to five o'clock tea on Thursdays, and I hope to see you among them whenever you like."

"Thanks. I will come some Thursday when I am not engaged."

"Ah, perhaps your afternoon is filled. I am out so much that I do not like people to call on other days at that hour. It is such a bore missing them. Of course I sometimes have tea-parties by invitation, in fact Captain Brabazon has one to-day, and your husband is kind enough to come. It is about some business, racing, I think; and even I may be *de trop* when I have poured out the tea, so I cannot ask you, or I should have been delighted."

"You are very kind, but I am going home, so it is as well," smiled Alice, "I will wish you and Robert good-bye then—and you too, Captain Harcourt; are you going to tea?"

"No; Captain Brabazon has not honoured me with an invite. May I come with you, our roads lie together?"

"Certainly." So these two went away together, and there was a malicious smile on Maud's lips and a wicked gleam in her eyes as she turned to her companion.

"Captain Harcourt is hardly so amusing as he used to be, I think."

"I think his head is in the clouds. He's always reading, and he and my wife talk of nothing else but books."

"That must suit them both admirably. Do you know I am dreadfully tired of this place, let us go home. If Captain Brabazon has not come, we will have our tea together without waiting."

That night, over the wine at Mess, there was some talk about the Ainsworths, and Barron remarked across the table to Harcourt,

"I said after the marriage Mrs. Ainsworth had a good deal to learn, and I thought so this afternoon, eh, Harcourt?"

"Or we have, according to which way you look at it. The Westmoreland hills, and a series of garrison towns, must turn out rather different scholars. The curriculum is hardly the same. I suspect the first is the most classical."

As Mr. Barron was one of the excellent people who always take things literally, he remained silent and mystified, while Harcourt took up his glass and moved lazily to a chair further up the table. Here he was next the senior major, a soldierly man with grizzled hair, now listening with great enjoyment to a hot argument between two ensigns on the use of cavalry.

"What the deuce do you find to amuse you in

that stuff, Martyn?" asked Harcourt irritably, after watching him for a few moments.

"Eh? It's by no means all stuff, I assure you, and you know I like to see what material our youngsters are made of. That one's a capital young fellow."

"Glad to hear it; it's more than the other one is."

"What's wrong with you, Cecil? You've taken a very jaundiced view of life lately. Hallo!"—the kindly grey eyes looked anxiously at Harcourt—"you were the Diver's best man; you were not hit by one of the bridesmaids, were you?"

"Not I; you needn't be afraid."

"Don't you go in for that, my boy. You're the best soldier among us, and I can't spare you. You mustn't marry."

"It's not the least likely. But be honest, Martyn, do you never get tired of all this?"

"What, the Mess, do you mean?"

"Yes; the same topics, the same opinions, night after night. I declare I know what the fellows are going to say better than they do themselves; and you've been at it so long, too."

"Well, I hadn't such luck in my youth as you've had," replied the Major, good-humouredly; "but it's just as well. If I had got my promotion sooner, I'd have been shelved now, and what on earth should I have done? As it is, I may stick to the old regi-

ment for some years yet, and I don't think you will owe me a grudge, Cecil, though I do stand in your way."

"No, indeed, Martyn, I don't know how we'd get on without you."

"Well, some of you would miss me, I hope; and believe me, in spite of its tameness, a man's old Mess is his best home—I mean for landless fellows like myself; you have other duties. By Jove! I wouldn't change my place here, with all its associations, to sit opposite the fairest face in Christendom."

"Upon my word, I wish I were you!" said Harcourt, rising; "you're the greatest philosopher I know. Well, I'm off to my room to read. Come up, if you like, when that eternal whist of yours is over."

The old Major shook his head as he too left the table, and muttering, "Something wrong there; it's a woman, I'll be bound," he went off to his rubber. There his reflections on his favourite so interfered with his play that his partner was thrown into abject confusion of mind. Something was indeed wrong when the Major's game was not up to the mark.

Not a word did Harcourt read when he reached his quarters, but far into the night he sat by his fire, thinking, questioning himself, as his habit was.

Who was he, that he should be Pharisaical?

Would he have felt this virtuous indignation against Maud if she had wounded any other woman but Mrs. Ainsworth? Could he blame the man who was so easily induced to go to Maud's house, when he himself had been so supremely happy that afternoon in Mrs. Ainsworth's socity? Yet no, this was morbid, for he knew that the Brabazon afternoon parties were certain to include scandal, talked so brilliantly that it became a jest, with probably a little flirtation, and "just one rubber to finish the entertainment."

Whereas, he thought of Alice moving gracefully in her sunny room as she made the tea ready, her innocent eyes, her sweet laugh, her unsullied nature, and he paced the room with impatient steps as he reflected on Ainsworth's blind folly and his own impotence.

Stay, was he quite helpless in the matter? Had he no influence he could use? With his old chum he had none; he felt that where the wife, the queen that should have been, had failed, he dared not interfere. But with Maud, he thought carefully over his acquaintance with her, and fancied he understood her. She had an insatiable craving for admiration—had even enjoyed being complimented by him when he was but an idle young subaltern. Her life was, must be, an unhappy one, and therefore she desired excitement; but she was not all bad. If he were to speak to her fairly and frankly, would

she consent to let Ainsworth drop? Or—for there was a bitter side to her character—would she only seek the more to fascinate him? It was a terrible risk, yet he felt inclined to try it—the more so as he knew that Ainsworth seldom paused to weigh an action or consider a word.

However he might decide in the end, of one thing he was certain—no deed, word, or glance of his should ever make Alice's pure eyes look at him less trustfully. Nothing in his power should be left undone that could afford her an instant's pleasure; but, whatever the cost to himself, the world should never even whisper that they two were more than ordinary friends. With this resolution in his heart, he went to sleep, and did not know that his reflections had led him into two serious blunders. Alice's character he read rightly, as love does read, with the instinctive quickness of true sympathy. Ainsworth he knew, as one man knows another in a regiment, where the bad qualities are pretty sure to be gauged. But he under-estimated the effect of his own chivalrous manner on women he knew well, as was perhaps natural, for the knightly nature is always humble. Worse mistake still, he forgot that a desire for admiration is often the disguise thrown over a pitiful craving for love.

Some women there are who, if only their hero's cup of happiness is full, are content that another

woman should fill it; but Maud Brabazon had been nurtured in a very different school.

Days slipped by, and Christmas Eve came, when there was always a large gathering at the —th Mess. The wonted toasts and merriment must have touched some lingering softness in Ainsworth, and Alice was awoke, about two in the morning, to find a figure, bright in scarlet and gold, stooping over her, and saying cheerily, "A merry Christmas to you, wife."

The poor child threw her arms round his neck, thrilling almost painfully at the unwonted tenderness; she little knew what a depth of lovingness lay unawaked in her heart.

Her husband went to church with her, and they dined with the Redmaynes, so that Christmas Day was full of sunshine, but it was the gleam before a storm, for Ainsworth's manner began to grow daily more surly and irritable. The landlady occasionally asked questions as to his movements, in a tone that struck strangely on Alice's ear, and she almost believed that some trouble must be impending, of which she alone did not know the cause.

Once, when they were getting into a cab, a shabby-looking man darted out from a portico opposite, and thrust a document into Ainsworth's hand.

"I have the original here, sir," said he, touching his breast-pocket.

"Very well, all right," said the former, putting the paper into his own without opening it.

"What is that, Robert?" asked his wife anxiously, though a recollection of a passage in a certain novel suggested the explanation.

"Nothing. Never you mind," answered he, and talked on, as though nothing had occurred. It was always the same; the wife tried, by every means in her power, to obtain her husband's confidence, and failed utterly, so that she was forced to bear herself as though she were deaf and blind, while his face grew harder, and his letters were received with a smothered oath.

Several times she reminded him that bills were due, but he took no notice of her remark. At last the landlady began to complain, and nerving herself for an effort, Alice again broached the subject.

"Robert, Mrs. Cole says she must be paid, and I really can't put her off again."

"Why can't the woman wait?"

"I suppose she cannot, and I do not see why she should. Robert, dear, if we are spending too much, do let us go and live somewhere else. If you would only trust me, and let me understand!"

"I hate talking of business. There's a cheque, send it to Borrough's to-morrow—no, take it yourself; I can't go. And go early, when there won't be so many people."

Alice did as she was bid, but it was an un-

pleasant task. Numbers of officers were passing to and fro through the noiseless swing doors of the agent's office, and surprise was very evident on their faces at the unwonted sight of a lady in such a place. There was a disagreeable pause too while the cheque was being examined. The man to whom she had given it turned to speak to her, but another stopped him, and her quick ear caught the words, "Hush, it's Mrs. Ainsworth."

Finally, after some delay, the money was handed to her, and she returned home, still more convinced that her husband's affairs were not as they should be.

"Allie, I want you to write to my father," said Ainsworth, on the following evening.

"Very well. I wrote a couple of days ago, however, so I have not much to say."

"Oh, you can find some chatter to fill a sheet, and then I want you to ask him for some money. Put it as nicely as you can, you know."

"Am I to say you want it at once?"

"I! You don't suppose you are to ask it for me! You must do it on your own account."

There was a minute's silence ere Alice raised her pale face from her work.

"I cannot do that, Robert; it is not true."

"Then, by Jove, it will be; you'll want money before long, I can tell you."

"Tell your father so, and ask him to help you."

"Alice, you are enough to provoke a saint! You

know my father's notions as well as I do, and you coolly propose that! You had better write as I bid you, or you will regret it."

"I cannot!"

"May I ask if this is your notion of obedience or love? You women are all alike. You'll profess everything, as long as you're not asked to go against some fantastic notion of your own."

"I will write a letter, which you shall see, in the only way I can write it. If you do not like it, I cannot help you. Even for you I will not beg for money I do not want."

"But suppose *we* want it badly?"

"Trust me, Robert; tell me all about it, and see if I will not do anything I can rightly do to help you."

"I've told you quite enough for you to act on. Write your letter at once, and it will catch to-night's post."

The letter was written, but its phrases were argued over till long past the post hour. A sort of compromise was effected which pleased neither, and with a heavy heart Alice awaited the reply.

It came, almost by return.

"The Beeches, Barnstead.
"Jan. 4th, 18—.

"DEAR DAUGHTER,

"I know my son better than you do, for I am his father, and you are only his wife. I recognize

his hand in your last letter very plainly. Tell him I appreciate the compliment he pays my head, when he tries so stale a plan for obtaining money. All the same you, my dear daughter, shall not suffer for his folly. That is to say, in a pecuniary point of view, I cannot help you in any other. If you are in trouble send me your bills. Send a note with them, to assure me you have not been incurring any unusual expense. Then I will pay them.

"As to my son's debts, if he chooses to make a clean breast of them to Captain Harcourt, I will communicate with him on the subject, but not with Robert himself. This is final.

"Your affectionate father-in-law,

"ANDREW AINSWORTH."

"D——n!" exclaimed Ainsworth, flinging the letter on to the table. "My father must be mad. Does he think I'm going to be treated in this way, as if I were a child? What the devil has Harcourt to do with my affairs, I'd like to know?"

"It does seem hard, Robert," said Alice, timidly; "but what else can you do?"

"Nothing, I suppose, as that infernal entail makes you a poor woman. I daresay you wouldn't ask your father for money, without telling him what every bill was for. Besides, it wouldn't do," he continued, as he remembered the figure there was to pay.

"Have we really no money, Robert? I know I have not drawn nearly all I have for dress, though I did take some of it for the house bills. Would what is left help you?"

"You are a wonderful baby for your age, Alice," returned her husband, rendered almost good-humoured by a sense of the ludicrous disproportion between the balance in hand and the debts. "It would take your pin-money for several years to clear me. There, don't look scared. I suppose I must make the best of a bad bargain, and see Harcourt. Where's that precious epistle?"

Left alone, Alice thought for a while, and then wrote a letter, which she posted herself. It ran as follows:—

"Merrion Street, Thursday.

"DEAR FATHER,

"You are very good indeed to us, to me particularly, and it is a great comfort to feel that I have you to depend on. I should not like to tell my own people about Robert's affairs, and I am frightened when I know bills are due, and I have nothing to pay them with. But I want to say one thing. Isn't it a little hard for Robert to go to a third person about such matters? I think he feels it so. You know best, and perhaps I ought not to write this, but you have been so kind to me, and I cannot resist asking if you would very much mind writing

direct to Robert. He does not know of this letter. Please do not be angry with me.

"Your affectionate daughter-in-law,

"ALICE AINSWORTH.

Alice watched for the postman on the morning when the answer was due, and managed to slip away with it to her own room, feeling as guilty, poor child, as though she had been committing a crime. The contents made her gasp and stagger to the open window for a breath of fresh air.

"The Beeches, Barnstead.
"January 8th, 18—.

"DEAR DAUGHTER,

"I am not angry with you now, though I was at first. It is right enough that you should take your husband's part, but you oblige me to tell you what I would rather have kept quiet. Before your marriage, I asked Robert for a list of his debts, that I might pay them. He gave it me, and assured me it was a complete one. That was a lie. I found him out, and was sorry for you, but I could hardly go and tell what my own son had done. I daresay he thinks he has excuses, but I don't know them. I vowed then I would never have any business dealings with him again, and I keep my word. I might employ a lawyer, but that costs money, and lawyers are generally scoundrels. Harcourt is a gentleman, and won't cheat me, and he's a clever man, so

Robert won't cheat him. Keep this to yourself, but if you can give Captain Harcourt a hint to look sharp after things, do so.

"Your affectionate father-in-law,

"A. A.

"P.S.—I'm sorry, my dear, but you brought this on yourself."

A lie, and the man was her husband! Everything, save that one thought, seemed to grow indistinct round Alice. There ensued for her one of those pauses that happily come but rarely in a lifetime, when time goes on, but thought and feeling seem to stop, arrested by some knowledge, the meaning of which they cannot grasp.

Her husband's voice calling her to breakfast brought her to herself, and she tottered to the door. Her heart was beating now painfully, so that she was sick and dizzy. She leant over the bannisters, and begged him to breakfast without her, as she was not well, and then threw herself on the bed, hoping that the palpitation would cease.

Again she had to rouse herself, for Ainsworth's rapid step was on the stair. She locked the door just as he touched the handle.

"What's the matter, Alice?—are you ill?"

"No, I am out of sorts. I felt faint."

"You shouldn't lock your door, then. Can I do thing for you?"

"No, no—I shall be better soon—don't wait."

"I can't—parade's early. Get Mrs. Cole up if you're not better, and do unlock the door."

He was gone, and Alice went down for some attempt at breakfast. She could touch nothing but some tea, then hurried over her housekeeping, gave orders that no callers should be admitted, and returned to her own room with Mr. Ainsworth's stern letter in her hand. Does her misery seem overdrawn? Perhaps it may; but then she was so ignorant, this poor little country girl! She knew nothing of the world and its ways—nothing of the intricacies of the masculine code of honour.

To her simple mind debt appeared to be akin to theft. She did not know how easy it is for a man to order articles that he "must have," without stopping to consider how or when they are to be paid for. Nor would she have understood that an intention to pay "some day" is a salve that should prevent conscience from pricking needlessly. As to that other terrible accusation in the letter, she saw it in her mind's eye, knew exactly where it lay on the page, and yet she forced herself to read it again. It was as if an ungentle hand had turned a key in a lock, and opened a door she had kept carefully closed. She was face to face with the skeleton behind the door now, and she knew that never again would she be unconscious of its existence.

The perfect openness of her own nature made

her quick to notice any appearance of double-dealing in others, and on several occasions she had felt that her husband had been less than truthful.

She had heedfully kept clear of every subject that he seemed inclined to evade, but, in spite of her care, she knew that there had been evasions. Each was probably a trifle, but drops of poison may kill, if administered often enough.

As she lay on her bed, seeing the dusty sunbeams creep along the pale wall, hearing the dull sound of wheels increase with the coming of noon, she saw also in a mental panorama the stages of her own life and love. She saw herself, a young, happy girl, full of wondrous dreams, so pleasant in the dreaming that she never thought of them as possible realities. She went over the incidents of her acquaintance with Ainsworth from the breakfast at Hazelshaugh to a moment the recollection of which stabbed her.

She had been reading to herself the "Rhyme of the Duchess May," and he took up the book when she was out. One or two lines struck even his unpoetic fancy, and he asked her on her return whether she thought such a tale possible, would she, for example, have dared death like the duchess?

"I hope so," she had replied. "A woman who could not die so would not deserve life."

"Then for such a Duchess's sake I could envy

Sir Guy," he answered, looking straight into her eyes.

She saw herself and him while he could still use honeyed phrases, and she was full of radiant belief in him; she thought of herself and him now, on this miserable morning when she knew him for what he was.

The mind is never so wayward as during grief. Perhaps it is the rarity of happiness that makes it so absorbing; certainly our thoughts seldom play truant in moments of delight. But in seasons of distress, who does not know how they wander? We seem to let the reins drop from slack fingers, that in brighter hours would make the steed curvet proudly, answering to the curb.

With no connecting link that she could trace, there came suddenly to Alice a memory of her childhood. She saw again the drawing-room at the Red Hall, with the low sun shining on her father's kindly face, as he sat in an arm-chair by the fire. She saw herself, in a short, print frock, the rosebud pattern on which was distinct in her mind's eye, standing before him to recite a newly-learnt poem, while Aunt Jane looked over her spectacles and paused in her knitting to listen.

She recollected the anxiety to do well that almost made her fail, and the happy certainty of coming praise with which she repeated the concluding

lines. Her aunt applauded, her father kissed her, and said, with his hand under her chin,

"Wonderful ideas, these, to put into your head. I suppose my little lassie expects just such a lover to come for her some day!"

"If the lover that comes is not such a one as that, I will not have him, father," she replied.

"Then I think you'll be Miss Percy all your life," he answered, laughing.

The poem was the Swan's Nest, and only too well did she remember now the description of the knight—

> "I will have a lover
> Riding on a steed of steeds,
> He shall love me without guile."

Tears brought her the relief that only expression of a sorrow can give, and then she began to think of action. She was no sentimentalist, to cherish her grief and feed it with self-pity. The Percy blood was strong and healthy, and romance, a different thing from sentiment, is the nurse of heroism.

Her first idea was to give her husband the letter, in the hope that some sign of regret might soften her towards him. This, on second thoughts, appeared a breach of confidence, and she could only determine to do her duty to him, as best she might. She knew that her father-in-law had not meant to be unkind, but it seemed a refinement of cruelty to bid her, a wife, speak to another of her husband's

faults. Surely, when that sentence was penned, the writer had forgotten to whom he was addressing it. And yet, if she did not act upon it, some further complication might ensue, for which she would be responsible. "Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra," she would do that duty, too, as tenderly as she knew how.

It added to her pain that Ainsworth was unusually gentle and considerate that evening. Would it have lessened it, had she known that he was thereby soothing his conscience, which rebuked him for spending the afternoon with Mrs. Brabazon?

Captain Harcourt, when first appealed to, utterly refused to be again the medium of communication between the two Ainsworths, but a very brief statement of the case made him retract his refusal.

To help Alice he would have done a far harder thing than was now asked of him, and he saw at a glance that help was promptly needed.

Neglected bills for forgotten articles, sent in afresh when the tradesmen saw Ainsworth's marriage in the papers; bills for needless luxuries ordered within the last few months; a jeweller's account for a bracelet that shone on Maud's round arm, debts contracted in one or two luckless racing ventures—all these and more poured in on Harcourt, and were discussed by him patiently.

In spite of his vexation, Ainsworth was forced to

allow to his wife that he could not have been in better hands.

She, anxious to comply with her father-in-law's wish, resolved that if another day passed without her meeting Captain Harcourt, she would write to him.

There was no need, for when taking a walk that afternoon she saw him going moodily along in the direction of his club, and hurried across the road to speak to him.

The kind face brightened at so unwonted an advance, and Harcourt tried not to assent too eagerly when she asked him, if he was not engaged, to come home with her.

Till they were in the drawing-room they talked safe common-places, but seated there, Alice began nervously,

"I wanted to see you about Robert's affairs, but I hardly know how to say what I have to say; it seems so wrong of me to discuss the subject at all."

"I can quite understand your feeling, but you know I have no object in the matter but to serve him and you. Indeed you may trust me."

It flashed across Alice's memory that her aunt thought this man deserving of trust, and it seemed to her the verdict was a right one.

The grave countenance, the calm eyes, the even voice were surely indications of a reliable character. She would take him at his word, and so he, who was in all honesty endeavouring to make his thoughts

accord with his guarded manner, won his first reward.

"My father-in-law and I have exchanged letters, but Robert does not know about them," she continued hesitatingly. "I thought it hard he should have to speak, even to an old friend like you."

"So it is. Pray tell me just as much or as little as you like; spare yourself any pain you can," he replied, answering more her tone than her words.

"Mr. Ainsworth told me his reasons—" She paused, and her lip quivered.

"I know something of them also."

"Do you?" Alice looked at him with fear in her eyes. She trembled to think that anyone else should know of her husband's fault. His answer comforted her.

"I know that on previous occasions Robert has been careless, like most men, and for some reason or other there has been great bitterness in his father's mind."

"Ah! Mr. Ainsworth wished me to say to you, to caution you—I mean he is very anxious that this settling should be an accurate and complete one. Robert is so forgetful about accounts."

"I understand; I will do all I can to make it so; do not grieve yourself further."

Harcourt rose as he spoke, pitying with all his heart the shame-faced woman before him; he had

never reverenced her more than when she raised her brimming eyes to his, and said simply,

"Good-bye, and thank you. You are a real friend, and we both owe you much."

CHAPTER VI.

" . . . .

We sow in smiles, we women. Thus we reap,—
But oh! to see us earning our reward
Might make the fiends laugh, or God's angels weep.

"Thank Heaven a day will come, will come no doubt,
To drop the curtain, turn the footlights low,
And tell the people that the play's played out,
The actors gone to rest. They'll sleep well so."

M. C. S.

It was a sore trial at this time to Alice that she could not write fully to her father and aunt. She shrank from even hinting to them that she was not happy, and every sentence she penned had to be carefully considered, lest she should betray herself to those loving eyes. The deception was kindly, but it added to her burdens.

But when at last Mr. Ainsworth settled all the debts that were so terrible to her—when she knew there was nothing further to vex her husband, she determined to make one more effort to secure happiness. She believed that he had once loved her; she would try to bring that love to light in their daily life—try, not timidly, as at first, but frankly, as a wife should.

Externals have a wonderful influence over us,

and surely, therefore, the charms of a pretty room, a bright fire, a comfortable chair, and the consciousness of having eaten a good dinner, ought to dispose a man to kindliness, even though the companion of the hour were less pleasing than Alice. But while in some men rest and comfort incline the mind to be more delicately sympathetic, in others they only cause intense laziness. Those who have watched the sleepy eyes of a ruminating animal will not fail to recognise the same expression on certain human faces. Such a one was Ainsworth's; therefore, the first allusion to matters of fact broke in rudely on his vacuous repose, and he did not reflect that, except in the evening, his wife had few opportunities of speaking to him.

To do him justice, he showed no open resentment, but to a woman's perceptions the bored tone of his voice was sufficiently discouraging. Determined not to be too easily baffled, Alice laid aside her work, and knelt down at his side.

"If you would but promise, Robert, to tell me about money-matters in future, and not keep me so in the dark. I am not a baby, you know, dear."

"Oh! I'll promise anything you like, if you'll only talk no more of that confounded money. I'm sick of it."

"Well, I won't after to-night, if you'll give me that promise. I do so want our home to be a happy one, Robert, and how can that be without confidence?"

"Good gracious! Isn't it happy, then? It seems to me to be all right. What on earth are you driving at, Alice?"

She looked at him earnestly for a moment, and answered quietly,

"Nothing. I didn't mean to bore you. Give me a kiss, and then I'll leave you in peace."

"There then. What a child you are!" said he, barely touching her hair with his lips, ere the ruminating process commenced again, and she rose and resumed her work.

She thought of an American story she once read, in which a wife passes over all her husband's failings, because "he doesn't understand," and her patience is rewarded when he is dying by a gleam of full sympathy.

She saw clearly that her dreams of perfect companionship were to her husband quite incomprehensible, and she asked herself whether, like the American heroine, she could live alone bravely, and without complaint. She doubted her own powers of endurance, and her heart sank as she remembered that in another year the —th must leave England, and she would be thrown more than ever on her own resources.

As an immediate result of this train of ideas, she began to appear more frequently in society. On her arrival in Dublin, her own quiet drawing-room had

been pleasanter to her than any other, but now she longed to be among her fellow-creatures.

There were no endearing associations, no sunshiny memories, to make the sofa, the books, the very tea-table, companions.

On the contrary, the white and gold of the wall paper, the bright newness of her wedding presents, gave a chilly air to the whole apartment, so that, after hours of solitude, a ghostly sensation used to creep over her, and she felt as though light-hearted Alice Percy had been changed into a lay figure in a gaudy show.

Hitherto she had rather avoided the Redmaynes, dreading lest she should betray her unhappiness to them, but now the craving for sympathy was too strong to be withstood, and she sought them out. Mrs. Redmayne, who guessed shrewdly at the cause of the change, took no notice of it, but told her she looked ill, and counselled her to go out more than she had done.

Her plain speaking probably hurt less than a half-veiled phrase might have done.

"We all know Captain Ainsworth's not a very domestic character," said she. "Some men are not, and they can't help it, any more than they can change the colour of their eyes. But you should act accordingly, if you are wise."

"How, Mrs. Redmayne? I can't alter the colour of my eyes; but, I suppose, being a woman, I am

expected to change my character. Is that what you mean?"

"Ah, my dear, when you are older you won't speak so bitterly. You'll see that women are expected to suit themselves to their husbands, just because they can change, and the men can't. Don't poets talk of a woman being like ivy on a tree?"

"Yes; but the tree supports the ivy, and lets it cling."

"And if he isn't a scoundrel, a man will help his wife in any real trouble. The tree may be sound at the heart, though the bark is a little rough. You don't mind my talking to you, I hope, my dear?"

"You know I don't. But, the truth is, I can't see deep into things. I never could solve any problem, and masculine motives and ideas remain a complete problem to me."

"I know nothing about problems. Money wasn't very plentiful in my home, and there were too many of us for much education. But I have learnt some of the knowledge one picks up in everyday life, and Dick has taught me a good deal. I think men come out much better in great things than in small."

"But, Mrs. Redmayne, life is made up of little things, not great ones."

"And the little ones are our work, and the great ones for the men to do. That's division of labour. My dear, when you want to have a chat over trifles, come to me, or to some other woman, and don't

bother your husband with them. We understand each other, and when the men don't understand, they mostly set us down as idiots."

"That's not a complimentary estimate of their discernment, I must say," exclaimed Alice, laughing in spite of her sore heart.

"Oh, I don't think it's very bad. They're made so, you know. And now, are you coming to the 200th's ball?"

"I think not. I know none of the officers, and it seems so odd to go."

"Not a bit. The one regiment asks the other, no matter whether you know any of them or not. Your husband does. You ought to go out."

"Why, is that a duty too?"

"Of course it is. A bright young thing like you ought to enjoy it, and meeting other folk is good for you. Besides, your husband will like to see you getting on well. You shouldn't be always moping at home."

"Very well, I will do this immediate duty, and accept the invitation."

"That's right. Put on your prettiest dress, and look your best for the credit of the —th; and give me your advice about my get-up, will you?"

"May I? I should like to help you if I can; you are so good to me."

"Then come to-morrow morning, and I'll wear

exactly what you bid me, for I've no time to fidget over my dress."

It was a kindly offer, made more for the sake of interesting Alice than on account of the well-worn silk in which good Mrs. Redmayne appeared on state occasions.

When her numerous children were in bed that night, she set about securing her husband's good offices for her favourite.

"Dick, put down that novel and listen. You're going to dance at the 200th's ball."

"The deuce I am! What's that for?"

"Because I want you to pay all the attention you can to Mrs. Ainsworth."

"Mrs. Ainsworth again! Really, Polly, you're quite crazy about that girl!"

"And I expect you to be the same. Seriously, Dick, Captain Ainsworth's a fool!"

"Your language is strong, but the idea is by no means new."

"Well, but his wife is very far from being a fool."

"So much the worse for her."

"Quite so; but she wants friends sadly."

"Isn't she rather romantic?"

"She's young, and has read more poetry than you and I could manage in our whole lives. But, Dick, she wants wisdom, everyday wisdom, such as you taught me, dear, and she has no way of learn-

ing it, except by experience; that's hard on a pretty young thing like her, Dick."

"And so my good old wife wishes me to try to help her. Of course I will, Polly, if a chance occurs, only I can't exactly take her and preach to her as I did to you."

"No, but you know just what I should like you to do—drop an occasional bit of practical sense when you are talking to her; show her that there may be good where she doesn't see it. No one can do it better than you."

"That's right; always administer a little sugar to your obedient husband. I'll put myself down for as many square dances as Mrs. Ainsworth chooses. I suppose you don't expect me to waltz?"

"On the whole perhaps I had better say no; it might make her less friendly if you did," said Mrs. Redmayne smiling, for she knew that her worthy Dick's powers in that line were about on a par with her own.

Redmayne kept his word on the night of the ball, and not unwillingly, for his kindly heart was touched by the sight of the fair face and timid eyes of his wife's friend.

The Ainsworths had just entered the room when he first observed them, and Alice was mentally comparing the pleasant little ball-room at Hurlborough with this great Hall and increasing crowd. She was scarcely at her ease in the midst of these blazing

uniforms, and the vivid colouring of the ladies' dresses seemed to be heightened by the glittering military decorations on the walls. She turned to her husband, and, as too often happened when she addressed him now, a doubting expression crossed her face.

"By Jove! Polly," exclaimed Redmayne to his wife, "I shouldn't like you to look at me in that sort of way. She's like a scared child!"

"It's pitiful, dear, isn't it?" replied she, pressing the stout arm on which she dearly loved to lean.

"Poor little thing! she certainly wants more courage. I'll go and speak to her at once. You're all right in this corner, I suppose?"

"Yes. Mind you bring her here between the dances."

Before Redmayne could edge his way through the crowd, he saw the pale face light up with a smile of welcome, and the next instant Mrs. Ainsworth was coming towards him on Captain Harcourt's arm.

"I am forestalled, Mrs. Ainsworth. I was trying to get at you. You will give me a quadrille or two, I hope?"

"Certainly," said Alice, who liked the homely manners of the speaker. "The next one, if that will do."

"And No. 8 besides, please. My wife is over there, and hopes you'll join her between the dances;

and you must make me useful if you want ices. That is, if you are not better engaged."

"Thank you, I will. I know so few people that I am not likely to dance much."

"Don't be too sure, Mrs. Ainsworth," said Harcourt. "And Redmayne isn't to monopolize the ices either, it isn't fair."

"We will share them, then," replied Redmayne. "Are you really going to rush into that awful vortex of dancers? I've seen one spill already."

"I don't know. Ask Captain Harcourt," answered Alice, glancing up at her partner.

"We are going to try," said he. "It is difficult, though, to dance in a Dublin room, the natives are so frightfully energetic at it. Just look at that couple, for instance; I hope the pace may kill them soon. I suppose it's the national impetuosity breaking out. One half expects to see some of them go off into a jig, and begin to flourish shillelaghs."

"Yet you are going into the thick of the battle, and mean to risk Mrs. Ainsworth's dress in it."

"My dear fellow, I like dancing. There, that tearing Irishman has subsided. Let us try this small circle while he's getting his breath."

Harcourt was a perfect dancer, and as Alice had a good ear, which made up for her want of practice, she soon found herself floating round the room with more ease, and quite as much pleasure, as at her first ball.

Redmayne went back to his wife's side, and they watched the dancers from a step on which the seats were placed.

Apparently a thought struck them simultaneously, for they looked at each other, and then he asked gravely—

"Does she ever laugh as merrily when she's with her husband?"

"Dick, how could she? Did her husband ever talk in his life as Captain Harcourt can?"

"Does an ass sing?" said Redmayne, between whom and Ainsworth there was no love lost. "All the same, Polly, as Providence has let her marry the one man, and not the other, it's a great pity she should have so many opportunities of contrasting them."

"I know, I know; but oh, Dick, you'll make me very angry if you think any harm of those two. She is such an innocent child, and he——"

"Is the finest fellow I know. You don't need to tell me what old Harcourt is," replied Redmayne, who had seen his friend tried as only service tries a man. "Far be it from me to think any harm. I'm only sorry for them both."

"So am I. But, Dick, look across there. That is the worst part of the whole business."

"It is indeed," he answered—as well he might.

Captain Ainsworth was standing opposite to them, eager, and even nervous, and was speaking

low and rapidly to his partner in the pauses of the dance. She, it is needless to say, was Maud Brabazon, splendid in black and crimson, rich chrysanthemums in her hair and at her breast, and heavy gold torques on her shapely throat and arms.

She was certainly a royal-looking woman at a distance. Her stately figure and peculiarly smooth gait could not fail to attract attention; it was only closer observation that detected the evidence of an uneasy mind in the slightly constrained mouth and restless eye. To-night she was at her best, for she delighted in balls, and she knew that Ainsworth was right when he said earnestly—

"You are looking superb."

She was accustomed to this outspoken admiration, and it did not displease her. That Harcourt was incapable of anything of the kind, provoked her, while, at the same time, it made his society more attractive.

She felt dimly that his reticence implied a certain respect due to her womanhood which was wanting in the men who praised her so openly. Yet she was full of contradictions, and longed for power to rouse him out of his undisturbed, courteous calm. These feelings were now intensified a hundredfold, for the passion of jealousy was added to them—jealousy of the only woman who possessed the power she so desired.

Of late Maud had begun to weary of her life; its gay successes no longer sufficed her, and she was growing impatient of its emptiness and deceit. She had dressed herself with extreme care for the 200th's ball, craving more restlessly than ever for some attention from the only man whose good opinion she prized. It seemed to her ill-regulated heart that, winning that, she would be in some degree raised in her own self-esteem. She saw him, before she had been five minutes in the room, talking happily to the girl whose pure life lay so far apart from her own.

Soon afterwards they passed her, and Harcourt bowed coolly, with not the slightest sign of interest in his face. Then the devil entered into Maud Brabazon. She set her teeth a moment, ere she remarked to Ainsworth carelessly,

"Those two are great friends. How often do you allow Mrs. Ainsworth to dance with the same gentleman?"

She had overshot her mark, as usually happens when jealousy feathers the arrow. Ainsworth for once shrank from something in her tone, and answered sharply,

"It would hardly be fair to give less liberty than I take. I don't intend to discuss Mrs. Ainsworth's proceedings."

Maud was awake to her blunder now, and though she mentally scored another grudge against

her unconscious enemy, she replied cautiously, and before long had more than regained her ground. Through all her amusing conversation she never missed a chance of watching Harcourt's movements, but strained to its utmost that curious sixth sense which enables a woman to detect the presence and observe the actions of a person apparently beyond the reach of her vision.

It was late in the evening when he came up to ask her for a dance—so late that, though she had kept a waltz free, a flash of temper made her tell him that at this hour her card was full.

"I am the loser," he said placidly, but he did not stay to talk to her, and she knew that she had destroyed her own pleasure, as a spoilt child does its toy. She saw Harcourt seat himself between Alice and Mrs. Redmayne, and fancied that his face wore an expression of relief. Was it possible that she, the queen of so many coteries, was to be twice slighted in one evening on account of that colourless girl?

Ainsworth's speech rankled yet, and she would be revenged. Even as the thought rose, his voice was at her ear.

"Is your card really full? I hoped I might have had another chance."

"Look for yourself then; perhaps it is not quite filled."

The unclaimed valse was appropriated, and

from that moment Maud exerted herself to the utmost, and her partners said she had never been more fascinating.

With Ainsworth she never failed to pass and repass a certain corner, where Alice, growing tired, sat still, and he was either too careless or too infatuated to remark the manœuvre. Mrs. Redmayne was gone down to supper, a serious undertaking with her, and, to Alice's horror, Mrs. O'Leary took the vacant place. As though this had not been enough, Mrs. O'Gorman, who had already accosted her twice, took up her station close by. Her loud remarks were as audible as ever, for in lieu of stooping towards Alice, she pitched her voice higher, and her victim, while she listened, felt in every nerve Mrs. O'Leary's look of undisguised amusement.

"There are some very striking-looking people here to-night," began the latter. "Do you admire many of them?"

"There are a good many pretty faces, I think, and some of the dresses are very handsome."

"Handsome, did ye say!" broke in the other lady, "I call them splendid. Ye'll agree with me, Mrs. O'Leary, there niver was a finer ball given by any regiment before."

"Really, Mrs. O'Gorman, my memory isn't equal to such an assertion."

"Then take my word for it. Your regiment

will find it hard to beat this, Mrs. Ainsworth. I hear though there's a lot of rich young men in it. Is that true, me dear?"

This, like a stage aside, was so distinct that Alice was provoked into as clear a reply.

"I have no idea. My husband never talks of his brother-officers' affairs."

"Quite right, Mrs. Ainsworth, she needs setting down," whispered Mrs. O'Leary; "I daresay your husband thinks more of *the ideal* than of such a thing as money, eh?"

"Perhaps he does; it is certainly more attractive," said Alice, rallying at this attack, which was made with a jaunty air of self-satisfaction.

Her other tormentor left her no breathing time, for she chimed in with a fresh question.

"Isn't Captain Harcourt there the heir to a peerage? They tell me he's a man with fine prospects. My Blanche says he's a man of taste too; he danced with her once at the Castle last Thursday."

"It's only a baronetcy, Mrs. O'Gorman."

"Oh, but there are some fine baronetcies too. I daresay his is a good one. There's Captain Ainsworth with that proud-looking woman in black again; I always forget her name. You shouldn't let him dance so often with her."

"I think you are much too good to him, Mrs.

Ainsworth; he is quite the talk of the room to-night," simpered Mrs. O'Leary.

Poor Alice looked up and remained silent. The crowd had diminished by this time, and in a window opposite stood Maud, flushed and beautiful, listening to three gentlemen, each pleading for one more dance. She raised her eyes, looked Alice full in the face, and turning to Ainsworth, held out her hand for him to button her glove, while she dismissed the others with a bow. Alice saw her speak, and indicate Mrs. O'Gorman with the slightest possible turn of her fan, saw her husband glance angrily across the room, and then the lights grew dim, the hot air seemed to choke her, and for the first time in her life she fainted. She came to herself in the cloak-room, where her husband had laid her on a sofa.

"What on earth made you stay in the heat so long, Alice? Why didn't you come away sooner, instead of making a scene?"

"Well, sir," interposed the maid, laying a wet handkerchief on Alice's forehead, "them fainting-fits do come on sudden, I know it myself."

"Do they? Then how long do they take to go off? Are you better, Alice?—can you sit up?"

She tried to obey, but fell back.

"It's no manner of use hurrying her, sir," said the girl again, indignantly. "I'll look after the poor lady, if you can't wait."

Harcourt was in the passage near the door, and

as he heard this colloquy, he turned sharply away, with a smothered oath. Running downstairs, he sought for Mrs. Redmayne, and speedily brought her to the cloak-room, to Alice's intense relief.

"Isn't she fit to go home yet?" asked Ainsworth presently. "I suppose I must take her."

"You needn't disturb yourself, Captain Ainsworth," replied Mrs. Redmayne stiffly. "Dick and I will gladly take charge of your wife. If I had been at hand, this wouldn't have happened. Come, my dear, Dick will get a cab in a minute, and we'll take you home."

Ainsworth felt himself set aside; his wife passed him without a word; Harcourt hurried away to call a cab, while the Redmaynes assisted her downstairs, and as he turned back into the ball-room, the last beseeching strains of the valse were dying away, and Maud saw that her spell was broken for that night.

Alone with Mrs. Redmayne, Alice fairly gave way, and poured out on her motherly shoulder the disappointments, fears, and hopes that had oppressed her. The worthy soul did not leave her till she had soothed and comforted her, encouraging her in the belief that a little life, which she now knew had been entrusted to her, might be the means of brightening her home.

There were tears in Mrs. Redmayne's own eyes

as she talked matters over with her husband when she reached her lodgings in the early dawn.

"Indeed, whatever I may say to her, my real belief is that things will go from bad to worse. A man that's unkind to a woman isn't likely to be gentle to a child."

"Ainsworth will never be gentle to anyone."

"You're always hard on him, Dick. There must be some good in him, if one could only get at it, but how that little wife of his is to do it, I don't know. Well, I'm glad, for her sake, that I went to the ball, otherwise I'd call myself an old goose. I feel as if I hadn't been in bed for a week, and it's almost time to get up."

CHAPTER VII.

> There are sorrows,
> Where of necessity the soul must be
> Its own support.
>
> WALLENSTEIN.

ALICE was so worn out that she did not leave her room for a couple of days, during which her husband tried, in a blundering sort of way, to make amends for his past neglect. Shyly and hesitatingly, she told him of the prospect before her, and his compunction increased.

He even submitted quietly to one or two curt remarks from Mrs. Redmayne, and so far mollified her that she told Dick that she "thought the man really had a conscience, and that he knew he had made an idiot of himself."

Alice wisely refrained from making any allusion to the night of the ball, and her husband was thankful to have "got off," as he expressed it to himself, "without a row." She was far too thankful for the improved condition of affairs to risk disturbing it by a hasty word, and for a week or two she enjoyed a sort of mental summer. By an effort of will she put from her all reflections on the past, and basked in the light of such love as she could obtain, though it was at best but a very pallid ray.

For Maud Brabazon, on the contrary, the sky was heavy with thunder-clouds.

Captain Brabazon, in spite of his apparent carelessness, usually knew pretty well what his wife was about, and told her plainly that she must not show her ill-will to Mrs. Ainsworth as openly as she had been doing.

"You always used to steer clear of quarrels with women, Maud, and you must manage to do the same still. You're playing your cards worse here than I ever knew you do."

"And you are unusually interested in the game, I don't see that you stand to win or lose anything on it."

"Yes, I do. I neither know nor care anything about Mrs. Ainsworth, but it suits me to be a good deal at the —th Mess. You know well enough she has friends in the regiment, and one can never say how things may be taken up. I won't have any fancy of yours interfering with me."

This admitted no reply, nor did Maud dare inquire what had occurred to provoke the rebuke. "Friends in the regiment;" yes, she had learnt that. It seemed as though again and again she were to find her wishes countered by the only woman she had ever hated. Still she could not help acknowledging to herself that Alice was not only unconscious of her offences, but transparently innocent of any intention to offend.

Just at this time sundry entertainments were given at a large country house near Dublin in honour of the marriage of the heir, and to one or other of them most of the garrison were invited. The Brabazons received cards for an afternoon musical party, and Maud determined to go, not for the sake of listening to the music, but lest it should be thought that she had not been asked. In vain she begged her husband to let her have a new dress for so special an occasion; he absolutely refused, and she was forced to appear in what she called her "reserve corps." When money was plentiful, she was apt to indulge in fanciful and picturesque costumes, but was well aware that because of their peculiarity they required to be speedily renewed. She therefore kept a dress on hand, ready for any contingency like the present, when she could not afford newer attire. It was a perfectly-fitting and richly-trimmed black silk, and with a handsome Indian shawl and tasteful bonnet she looked fully the equal of the most fashionably-dressed among the visitors.

Fortunately for those to whom vocal and instrumental *tours de force* are a weariness of the spirit, the grounds of Kilmaley were large, and the day was mild and sunny. Captain Harcourt, lounging about the door of the music-room, observed Maud standing near him, for the moment unattended. It struck him that here was an excellent opportunity of speaking to her quietly without going to her house.

Undecided as to his course of action after the ball, he had avoided meeting her; but he was becoming more and more inclined to attempt some interference on Alice's behalf. He heard from Mrs. Redmayne that Ainsworth had been of late less inattentive to his wife; but he also knew, though he kept the knowledge to himself, that he visited or met Mrs. Brabazon almost daily.

After some of these interviews, Ainsworth had, in fact, passed him in the street, walking blindly on with a pre-occupied air that augured ill for Alice's peace.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, he asked Maud to come out and look at the grounds, and she assented with a bound of the heart that told her how greatly she had feared the possible loss of his acquaintanceship.

Strolling through the grounds they encountered many people they knew, among them Mrs. O'Leary, who accosted them. She had never called on Mrs. Brabazon, but had been introduced to her at some party, "just to see," as she told a friend, "what the men run after her for."

"Rather a mistake having this sort of thing in March; don't you think so, Mrs. Brabazon?"

"Perhaps it is, but we all come to it."

"Of course. One is obliged to follow the multitude, but it is certainly to do evil in this case. Think of the colds we shall catch."

"Is that a necessity?" asked Harcourt. "If so, I suppose we have come out to look for ours."

"You haven't, for you gentlemen are not obliged to put on inappropriate garments in honour of a wedding that took place a month ago. Now we have to present our congratulations in silk, and in an east wind," said Mrs. Brabazon.

"Or velvet," said Mrs. O'Leary. "Have you seen Mrs. O'Gorman? she has had that green velvet five years to my certain knowledge. There's Miss Grey, —with her constant admirer, of course. They say he has been paying Miss Lefevre more attention than Miss Gray likes. I wonder which of them he'll marry? I pity her, whichever it is. Well, I must go in to warmer air, though this is mild for March. I came out with Major Bellaire, but he saw a lord, so he deserted me. I left him quite happy, poor man. I daresay we shall meet again; *au revoir*."

Maud looked after her with a sneer on her handsome face.

"Isn't there some curse in the Psalms on him that goeth up and down tale-bearing among the people? David must have seen some Jewish O'Leary when he wrote it."

"You are harder on women than you used to be," replied Harcourt.

"Am I? Surely you don't defend that one?"

"Not I; I think her entirely objectionable. But my accusation is true, is it not?"

Something unwonted in the tone of his voice warned her, and she retorted quickly,

"No, I am not harder on women. Of course one occasionally hates a woman, just as one occasionally respects a man."

"Perhaps the hatred is oftener undeserved of the two."

"Perhaps; but I question if a man can possibly judge of that."

He walked on silently so long that Maud grew impatient.

"How very absent you are to-day! What are you thinking about?"

"Of a very difficult question, in which you can help me if you choose."

"I will if I can. What is it?"

"How am I to touch the kindly side of a woman's nature?"

"That's a strange question, and the answer must depend on what you want from her. Do you really find it so difficult to do?" asked Maud, glancing at the resolute face beside her.

"I hope it may not prove so. I want her to do herself justice, by acting on her best, not her worst, impulses. I want her to use her power and knowledge of the world in behalf of a woman who has neither."

"Ah! on behalf of a woman. And in what way is she to do all this?"

"Very simply. She has only to forbid a fool to add to his folly," said Harcourt; and then feared that he had irretrievably spoilt his case. It was unpardonable to tell such a woman that admiration of her was folly in any man. For a moment he regretted his Quixotism; but having broken one lance he could not abandon the combat. When Mrs. Brabazon spoke, her voice trembled slightly.

"What is to be this woman's reward if she agrees to do as you wish?"

"Reward!—the approval of her own conscience, and the satisfaction of knowing she has given happiness to a creature that never harmed her."

"Conscience! A pretty comforter, truly! Don't play with me, sir. Finish your tale as Nathan ended his."

Harcourt knew his ground now, and he faced her as he replied—

"No, Mrs. Brabazon—for David did value the ewe lamb. The cases are hardly parallel."

"How do you know the value of a caprice to me?"

"I do not know. But I know this—that you are a woman whom Nature meant to be above caprices. And this special caprice cannot be worth very much to you."

"You mean Captain Ainsworth's society? Yet you think it worth a great deal to his wife."

"She cannot measure him as you do. And your toy is her ewe lamb."

"You plead well—for her. And you do not think your request costs me anything?"

"Plainly, no! Come, Mrs. Brabazon, you and I know enough of the world to speak frankly. What pleasure can a clever woman like you find in his society for its own sake?"

"Sketch him for me, that I may see if you understand the particular charm in him that makes me talk to him."

The dark eyes were watching Harcourt keenly, but he did not hesitate.

"Good-looking, can turn a pretty compliment of a certain kind, and can bowl straight enough. Is a very fair soldier, and can ride like the devil. That's the man."

"*And is Alice Percy's husband!* Cecil Harcourt, you think that man a fool, and you are right, but you yourself are blind and dull when you try to read a woman's motives, or move a woman's heart!"

The speakers were standing where a vista had been cut through the dense bushes of a shrubbery, and they could see far across fields shining in the tender-tinted bloom that belongs to early spring alone. Harcourt, always sensitive to the influences of nature, and thinking at the moment of Alice, felt the sudden dumb yearning for repose that is familiar to every woman, but rarely touches a man. It softened his face, and Maud, a tide of conflicting

passions surging in her heart, checked her angry speech as she looked at him.

"Could you not find some more cheering motive than conscientious satisfaction?" she asked slowly. "I like the approval of others better than my own. Why did you not ask this as a personal favour, for instance?"

"I should have thought the request in that form an impertinence. I make it on the simple ground of right."

"You were not such a stickler for right in the pleasant days when I knew you first."

"That may be; but, Mrs. Brabazon, I am going to be still more frank with you. Not a syllable of this conversation shall pass my lips again, and therefore I ask you why you have alluded more than once to our first acquaintance with each other? Why you chose to amuse yourself with the society of a conceited youngster, as I was then, I have no idea. I never grudged you that caprice." The smile on his face made these words more kindly. "I remember once writing you a note that contained some very boyish nonsense, and I was once guilty of stealing a glove, but I can remember no other indiscretion. Why do you talk as though I had in some way forgotten myself?"

Maud was white to her lips, she had not been prepared for this, and the flimsy pretences in which she hid unpleasant truths from herself were being

torn away. For an instant she thought of confronting him with the truth, and confessing that that note lay in her desk still. She had pride enough to refrain, but she clenched her hands under her shawl as she replied,

"It is a *façon de parler*. I did not mean you to regard it as an accusation. As to the why, I suppose it is because I am a humbug."

"Then don't be one. With your beauty and wit, you might surely choose to be your better self. As I said when I began, do yourself justice, and forgive my plain speaking."

"You don't need my forgiveness. But I have listened to more from you than I ever tolerated from any human being. I think I have earned the right to speak too. Do you suppose I cannot read your motive in all this? I am sharper-eyed than you are. Would you have pleaded with me on behalf of any woman but Alice Ainsworth? Would you have pleaded even for her, unless you loved her?"

It was Harcourt's turn to wince now, but though the plain phrase struck him with positive pain, his steady eyes held hers without faltering.

"You have borne much from me, as you say, and I can best repay you by trusting you. I'll answer your question honestly, believing that you will not betray me. Do you remember the breakfast at Hazelshaugh? If I had not been too indolent to act on my first impulse, I might perhaps have been

happier than I am now. I have never seen a woman so near my ideal as Mrs. Ainsworth, but I was too late, you see."

"I see, and I am sorry for her," said Maud, whose heart smote her as she remembered her own share in the delay.

"As to that, neither you nor I can judge. But, Mrs. Brabazon, you must not misunderstand me. You are the only human being to whom I shall ever make this confession."

"And you think you can go on meeting her, as you must do in the regiment, and that neither she nor anyone else will find you out?"

The resolute face wore a proud smile as Harcourt answered,

"I know it, because—and I have counted the cost—on the day that I suspect any complication of that sort, my papers go in, and my soldiering is at an end."

Tears were very rare indeed with Maud, but her eyes filled now, and she held out her hand.

"You are the only chivalrous man I know. You have conquered, and I will do what you asked me, and your secret will never be betrayed by me. Now go."

She kept that promise all her life, and no one ever knew what an agony of repentance, what vain longings, what loathing of her usual existence, racked that passionate soul for the next few days. Once,

and once only, it found utterance in a note that was lying on Harcourt's table when he returned from mess on the following night.

"I must ask one favour of you, and then I shall not allude again to what passed yesterday. For God's sake try to think as kindly of me as you can. You do not know what my life is. If anyone would credit me, as you did yesterday, with some good, I might do better. Do not answer this in writing, I shall know well enough whether you judge me mercifully. I want help so often.

"M. B."

"Poor soul," thought Harcourt, as he dropped the note into the fire. "How many lifetimes would one need to live before one could judge others rightly! Who would have thought that reckless Maud Brabazon could write such a note as that! Heaven help us all! I think the anchorites of old had the best of it. I must see her to-morrow somehow or other. I suppose we shall all go to hear the bands, whatever aches and pains we may feel."

He was right, for to trained actors it becomes a necessity to tread the boards.

Besides, society asks such inconvenient questions if one of its favourites breaks through the usual routine, whereas, if that is duly fulfilled, the undiscerning public eye takes show for reality. Maud

was in the winter garden as usual, but even her skill could not conceal the traces of unwonted suffering, so she sat down, and said her head ached too much for her to move or talk.

She could hardly keep her lips from quivering as she saw Harcourt enter, look round the building, and come straight towards her.

There was hearty friendliness in his voice and grasp of the hand as he greeted her.

"I am sorry to see you looking ill, Mrs. Brabazon."

"I have a dreadful headache. I shall go home in a little while. Thank you for your answer to my note."

"But I haven't answered it! I came to do so."

"And your coming *is* the answer."

She could not help one look in his face, and the misery in her eyes startled him.

"I do not know how far I can give you any of the help you want, as I do not know the circumstances; but you need never hesitate to ask me if I can be of the slightest use to you."

"You are very good. That promise is of itself a help to me."

"It is your——"

"Do not ask me any questions. I cannot talk here or now. I shall go straight home. But perhaps some day I shall take you at your word."

"Pray do. I owe you what help I can give you."

"What! Is it a debt then, for Mrs. Ainsworth's sake?"

"No; I owe it because you have shown yourself a generous woman."

"Thanks. You see I want your kindness for my own sake. It is the old leaven, I suppose. Will you get me a cab? I really cannot walk home."

"Certainly. Would you like me to come with you? You hardly look fit to go alone."

"No; but thanks again."

Harcourt called a cab and placed her in it; but though he bid her good-bye with undiminished cordiality, he was glad to be released. That she should have any real partiality for him had never occurred to him before, and he could only regard the possibility as both painful and perplexing.

Happily there was a great deal of pride and reasonableness in Maud's character, and he had appealed to both qualities. She saw more clearly than ever that he possessed merits she had thought existed only in fiction. She looked, for almost the first time, honestly into her own mind, not shirking the task of self-examination. Hidden beneath a crust of cynical worldly wisdom, she found better impulses, that she had stifled because she dreaded the pain they might cause her. The pain might betoken keener life, but she had not courage to face a continuance of it; better the dead safety of routine than the torture of a daily struggle with the evil in-

fluences round her. Dependent as she was on her husband, she could not attempt to alter her general mode of life; in that, chance must still be her guide. But two things were clear — Harcourt, who had proved himself so wise and honest a friend, should find that she was worthy of his confidence. With him at least she might and would be true to herself. She would banish every repining thought that only lowered her in his eyes, and wore out her spirit in a vain rebellion against the inevitable. And she would show Ainsworth that she was weary of him— as in truth was the case.

These resolutions she carried out unflinchingly; and who shall say that such actions are not recompensed even in this life?

Harcourt, who guessed the conflict, esteemed her for her victory, and ere the battery sailed for the East in early autumn, there existed between these two one of those pleasant friendships that, whatever the world may say, are, and ought to be, possible between man and woman.

CHAPTER VIII.

"There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for."
GEORGE ELIOT.

ALICE, in her simple unconsciousness of her influence on these other lives, was more nearly happy during these few weeks than she had been since her marriage. It is true she could neither forget her father-in-law's letter, nor ignore the unlikeness of her husband's mind; but, in her anxiety to forge some chain that should bind his affections, she reckoned up eagerly every little kindness that might form one of its links.

And Ainsworth wished to appear kind. He had coquetted willingly with folly, but he shrank from the cold looks of his immediate circle, and would fain have rectified his mistake if it could be done on sufficiently easy terms.

At first he contented himself with spending an hour or so by his wife's sofa, and consulting her wishes on trivial matters. For this somewhat monotonous duty he consoled himself by the visits that Harcourt had detected.

After the party at Kilmaley, this pleasure was over. His familiar knock was met at Mrs. Brabazon's door by an unfailing "not at home," and when

he saw her in society, he perceived at once a change in her manner, not so great as to attract general attention, but distinct enough to him. With consummate skill she avoided explanations or reproaches, and he, chafing and indignant, ended, as Maud expected, by turning to his wife for consolation.

"You're a good child, Alice," said he one night, after a long silence, during which he watched her deft fingers at their work, and thought how haughtily Maud had rebuffed him that afternoon.

"Am I?" said she, raising her pretty head, and wondering why he gazed at her so earnestly.

"Yes, you're always the same to a fellow, which is more than can be said of most of your sex."

Such a phrase as this was music to Alice's ear, and she built on it more than she would have done had she known the thought that underlaid it. She began to hope that her strongest wish might be fulfilled, and that they two might pass their lives together with a fair semblance of peace, if not love.

As if this period were to be folded like an idyll between tragic pages, she was summoned to the Red Hall ere her husband had wearied of his new domesticity, or sought for any fresh amusement.

The Squire, unwilling to acknowledge that he could no longer face wind and weather, had gone about his usual avocations during the bitter gales of

an inclement February. Cold and a low fever had so reduced him that, about the middle of March, Mrs. Ramsay telegraphed to her niece to come home at once.

She received the message at breakfast, and Ainsworth delayed going to the barracks for a few minutes to talk it over. He was surprised to see how quietly she spoke of all the arrangements which would enable her to leave by the afternoon boat. He knew only the surface ripples of his wife's character, and probably even Mrs. Redmayne had seen deeper than he into the still waters below.

The Squire lived for nearly a fortnight after his daughter's arrival. He passed away peacefully, his hand in hers, and his last words were that he was going to tell his own Alice that their child was worthy of her mother.

There could only be tender sorrow over the close of a life so full of the dignity of duty done, and Alice, as she laid the pure snowdrops on her father's breast, thought they symbolled fittingly the brighter spring to which he had gone.

When the long funeral procession had wound darkly down the glen, and the mourners had dispersed, the will was read, and then, with that abrupt contrast which is so painful in the midst of grief, Mrs. Ramsay and Alice had to discuss the future.

The latter's health, impaired by anxiety and

watching, made it desirable for her to remain awhile in England, and Walter Percy proposed that the two ladies should continue to reside in the old home.

The young hussar was much changed and improved, and took his cousin into his confidence, treating her as though she had been his senior by many years. His own mother had married again, and Walter was by no means inclined to allow his stepfather to live at the Hall. He therefore wished Mrs. Ramsay to keep the house in order for him for at least a year, so that he could spend his leave there, and hoped she would make it a real home both for herself and him. To Alice's private ear he confessed that he wanted to be able to run over there whenever he could get away from his regiment, because of its vicinity to Hazelshaugh.

"The fact is, Alice, of course I shall want to settle some day, and I don't think I could find a nicer wife than Ethel Philips. It's a good thing for a Percy to marry into one of the families near at hand, and Ethel admires this place awfully. She will have some money, I suppose, for her father's well off. Not that it matters," he added, laughing; "I should choose Ethel, no matter where she came from, or whether she had a penny."

"And do you suppose she is of the same way of thinking?" asked his cousin.

"It's hardly fair to ask that, Alice—at least, I've

no right to say much about it. But I think she is always glad to see me, and she's as true as steel."

"I am very glad, dear," replied Alice, stroking the boy's brown curly hair. "She is a very dear girl, and I hope your romance may run smoothly."

"Thank you," said he, looking up at her; and struck by the sadness of her expression, he added —"I wish you'd write to me, Alice dear; I'm not such a conceited blockhead as I was, and I'd like to know always how you are getting on."

"So I will, Walter; friends are too precious to be neglected, and the old Hall is a fresh tie between us. I shall want to hear when you change anything."

"It ought to have been yours, Alice, that's the truth. But though I can't alter the entail, I can try to carry out your father's schemes for the place. I'm glad he talked so much to me about them. I shall take to country life, too, after I've done a year or two of foreign service."

Walter's proposal was gladly accepted by Mrs. Ramsay. It would have been a terrible blow to her had she been forced to leave the home where so many happy years had slipped away. Her brother's death seemed to have aged her in a few days, and she was so nervously afraid of being left alone that she begged Ainsworth to let his wife remain at the

Hall till after her confinement, instead of returning to Dublin in a few weeks, as she had planned.

To this he assented, and in truth was not sorry to return to his bachelor quarters.

The unavoidable sameness of home-life oppressed him, while the monotony of the Mess did not offend him as it offended Harcourt.

The one man lived essentially in the present; if the passing moment pleased him, its relations to his whole life mattered nothing. The other lived his life as a whole, and would fain have wrung some tangible good out of each fleeting minute.

To Alice's great relief, Mrs. Ramsay never sought to penetrate the details of her married life. Her mind dwelt chiefly on the incidents of her own and her brother's childhood, and as she saw that Alice appeared contented, she asked nothing, fearing, with the sad wisdom of age, that to ask would be to court disappointment.

Quietly and dreamily the summer months passed by for the two women. The only visitor they received at the Hall was Ethel Philips, and it was soon apparent to Alice that Walter's affection would be fully returned.

Ethel was never weary of coming, and often rode over on a sturdy Scotch pony, and spent hours with her friends.

Many a volume was perused under the trees in these long summer days, Alice's voice rising mu-

sically as she read aloud, while Ethel lay among the ferns, and Mrs. Ramsay knitted or dozed in a sheltered corner.

It seemed to the reader that her own experience was like a lamp shining on the pages. In that new light she understood the struggles of troubled souls as she had never done before, and learnt from their stories lessons that had escaped her untaught eyes.

With painful fellow-feeling she studied "Andrea del Sarto," his loyal heart crying out at times, but oftener aching silently for want of the love and sympathy to gain which he sold himself in vain.

How pitiful the unfulfilled wish to sit

> "Here by the window with your hand in mine,
> Both of one mind, as married people use
> Quietly, quietly the evening through."

How terrible the repellent coldness of Lucrezia's frivolous heart! and yet Alice dimly felt that, because of that frivolity, Lucrezia's was by far the most miserable case.

Such disappointment as Andrea's she still hoped would not fall to her lot, for in her tender dreams it seemed as though a child's "waxen touches" must soften all asperities, and link father and mother in more perfect bonds. How could it be otherwise when they should stand together, looking at the delicate life that belonged to both?

When, therefore one balmy morning, her little

daughter was laid on her arm, after the first moments of intense delight were over, Alice drew the tiny creature closer, and fell into the deep sleep of perfect contentment. It was in September that the child was born, and when it was about three weeks old a shy, formal note came from Mr. Ainsworth, to the effect that if it were in no way inconvenient to Mrs. Ramsay, he would like to come and see his granddaughter.

It was curious to observe him when he sat by the cradle, where the small treasure lay serenely staring at the pink and white frills over her head. Leaning his broad hands on his knees, he stooped to watch the little aimless fingers with a pleasure he had never felt in his own son's babyhood, and more than once he wiped his spectacles hastily, as though some unwonted moisture had dimmed the glasses.

To Alice he was wonderfully kind, trying to step quietly, and finding gentler tones in his rough voice when he spoke to her.

"You have done me good, child," he said, as he bade her good-bye; and her pleasure deepened when she reflected that the tiny peace-messenger that could so soften this rugged nature must have a still holier power over him who was husband and father.

The October leave season saw Ainsworth, Harcourt, and Walter at the Hall. Harcourt had as-

sented eagerly when asked to be one of the sponsors, and as Ethel was to be another, Walter was deeply interested in the christening, and regretted that there could be no festivities to celebrate it.

It was a supreme moment for Alice when she led her husband to the room, from which the nurse had been banished, in order that she alone might show him their child. Her pretty tenderness touched even him, and he kissed her, and said kindly, "Well, let us see this wonderful baby;" but, while she lifted the little creature gently out of its cradle, his gaze was on her only.

She held it up to him, a world of affection trembling through her eyes and parted lips. He glanced at it an instant with a sort of curiosity, and remarked indifferently—

"Hm! I suppose it's like the rest of its kind. I never saw such a young specimen before. They're ugly little monsters to begin with."

The eyes widened, and shone something less brightly, as Alice said—

"Won't you take her in your arms, Robert?"

"Good heavens! I should drop it! I hope you never expect me to do that."

"You will kiss her then, at least?"

A distinct expression of disgust crossed Ainsworth's face.

"Not for the world! Babies are always in a slobbering state that isn't inviting. But I'll kiss

you, if you like. Why, what's the matter, Alice? You're not strong yet. Here, sit down."

He guided her to a chair, and she gasped out—

"Call the nurse, and go away."

"Dear me! she's been so over-excited about your coming, sir. Poor thing! You go away, sir, and let me see to her," exclaimed the nurse as she caught up the child, and hastily opened the window.

"It's only my heart beating," whispered Alice, when Ainsworth had been persuaded to leave the room, and then she lay down, and did not speak for some time.

When she roused herself, her first words were, "Nurse, bring me *my* child!" and over the sleeping face she shed the bitterest tears she had ever known.

She fancied that her manner was unchanged when she resumed her place in the drawing-room, but Harcourt detected a difference. He had seen her go upstairs on her joyous errand, and the remarks that Ainsworth made when he came down again gave him a tolerably correct idea of what had taken place.

His suspicions were confirmed after the christening, when the young mother was smilingly receiving the good wishes of the party, with the child in her arms. Ethel stooped and kissed the baby, and Ainsworth immediately exclaimed,

"How in the world can you do that, Miss Philips? I'd as soon kiss a frog—the creature squirms so abominably."

The girl made a laughing reply, but Harcourt saw the mother's eyes flash. Taking a pure white rosebud from a vase near him, he turned to her.

"May I put a flower into the little lady's hand? It looks appropriate, and I have carefully picked off the thorns."

"I'm afraid she won't hold it long," replied Alice, brightening visibly.

"Never mind, it looks pretty for the moment," said he, placing the bud between the dimpled fists; then, suddenly, he kissed one of them, and said, in a low voice, "God bless you, little Cecil, you are to be called by your second name, I know. I shall expect to be kept well up in my godchild's history, Mrs. Ainsworth."

Alice's face was radiant as she looked at him.

"I will try not to bore you with too much of it, and you may be sure her godfather will be a household word to her."

Autumn and winter passed with hideous rapidity, for the precious days are short indeed to those for whom exile is drawing near.

In January the —th were to sail for India, and each parting appeared to Alice to tear a piece out of her life.

Walter, Ethel, her poor old aunt, her father's

grave, her beloved glen, had each to be looked on for the last time, and she was often sorely tempted to give way to her fears, and refuse to accompany her husband.

He seemed able to be so happy without her that, as far as he was concerned, she might remain at home, and spare her child the perilous change of climate. On the other hand, her obvious duty was to go with him, and she tried to comfort herself with the thought that she would always have her baby to love.

When she paid her farewell visit to the Beeches, Mr. Ainsworth gave her an envelope which he desired her to keep herself, unopened, till some day when she might be greatly in need of money.

"If either you or your child were ill, my dear, and you wanted to come home in a hurry, then open it."

He did not tell her what sum he had enclosed, but the knowledge that she was to some extent independent, raised her courage.

The last few weeks were occupied with the preparation of her outfit. Every friend gave her advice, and each one had a fresh scheme for her. One lady, who knew India well, advised her to take only clothes for the journey; another, who said she knew it better, insisted that she must take every necessary for furnishing a house.

Utterly bewildered, she appealed to Mrs. Red-

mayne, who pointed out the golden mean, and assisted her in choosing all that was needful. She helped her also to engage a soldier's wife as nurse, and, in fact, aided her in the thousand ways in which one woman, who has been tried, can help another who is comparatively new to the world.

CHAPTER IX.

"Be thou thine own home, and in thine ownself dwell,
Inn anywhere;
And seeing the snail, which everywhere doth roam,
Carrying his own home still, still is at home,
Follow, for he is easy-paced, this snail;
Be thine own palace, or the world's thy gaol."

DONNE.

THE day of departure came at last, and Ireland, that had appeared to many a strange and foreign country, became "home," when contrasted with their new destination.

So thought Alice as she stood on the deck of the huge troopship, and watched the final preparations. The steep shore of Queenstown was at least British soil, and there was the music of familiarity in even the brogue.

Her heart was very full, and the tears had nearly forced their way, when a cheery shout from a boat caught her ear, and in another moment a light figure sprang up the gangway, and Walter was by her side.

"Couldn't get here sooner, Alice, but I never meant to let you go without a soul to see you off. I wish I were coming too! By Jove! what a jolly ship!"

The bright face and voice were like a tonic, and, thanks to her cousin's presence, Alice kept a brave smile on her lips, even when the engines began to throb, and he had to leave her standing alone at the side of the vessel. She never forgot the scene, new as it was to her—the crowded decks, where none betrayed grief save one poor woman, who cried piteously; the shore lined with spectators, the sun-lit water, and Walter waving his cap from the rowing-boat.

There came an instant, too, the remembrance of which always thrilled her, when the band struck up "Home, sweet home," and soldiers and spectators joined in a sudden parting cheer. To her, realising what undercurrent feelings must surely be hidden beneath these rugged faces, the whole farewell was pathetic and striking, yet to her companions it was a common-place to which they were accustomed, a scene hardly worth observing. Which gets nearest to the truth? Is the sympathetic nature, vibrating to every touch, in reality trembling at imaginary pathos? Does the matter-of-fact individual, to whom the primrose is but the primrose, and good-bye is but a civil phrase, get the best of it in this unequal world? Perhaps it is so, but one imagines there will be compensation somewhere for those to whom joy and pain are always intense. The greater the capacity, too, the rarer is the joy, and the pain predominates sadly. Surely there must be a different

future in store for a Beethoven and a Justice Shallow.

Mrs. Ainsworth and Mrs. Redmayne elected to be in the nursery cabin on account of their children, and during the month the voyage lasted they were drawn very close together. They and their nurses filled about half the cabin; the other berths were occupied by servants, and by children whose mothers were in the principal ladies' cabin close by.

Fortunately, Alice proved a tolerable sailor, and Mrs. Redmayne had the happy knack of accommodating herself to all circumstances, even to life on board ship. They kept the deck on many afternoons, when the cabins were in truth like Bedlam —when spoilt children squalled, mothers fussed, and nurses, with the peculiar obstinacy of soldiers' wives, seized every opportunity of closing all the ports. Alice as yet knew little of this class, and was embarrassed as well as surprised when she found that the ship's police had to visit the nursery at stated hours during the night, in order to ensure the admission of fresh air.

That inevitable night was indeed a time of trial, and Alice was the only passenger who thought life in the poorest cottage would be Elysium when compared with existence at sea. It was some days before she lost the feeling of strangeness and unreality that at first took possession of her. She scarcely recognised herself when she took her al-

lotted place at one of the long dinner-tables, ablaze with scarlet mess uniforms. On one side of her Ainsworth was talking to the officer next him, and paid no heed to her; but fortunately on the other was Mr. Barron, whose well-intentioned commonplaces helped her to recover, as it were, her individuality.

But the novelty of that dinner-table was less trying than its monotony as the voyage continued. When places at meals for about a hundred people are allotted by the arbitrary will of one individual, the probabilities are that only a very small minority are satisfied with the neighbours selected for them. The majority soon wear every available topic threadbare, and there ensues an oppressive silence, broken by spasmodic and ghastly attempts at cheerfulness. Every night four people have the benefit of variety, where chairs are left empty by the officer on duty, and officer of the watch. Sometimes an exchange of seats is quietly effected, but the captain of the *Burmah* ruled with a rod of iron, and no one ventured on such a freak at the table where he presided.

One night a young subaltern, anxious to be near kindred spirits, persuaded one of the doctors to change seats with him, but he forgot to carry with him to his fresh place, his table-napkin and a bottle of Sauterne from the swing-tray overhead. Being a noisy and impatient youth, the missing

articles were somewhat loudly demanded, a steward was slow to find them, heads were turned to look, and the roving eye of the captain noted what was going on. Inquiries were made, and thereafter no one attempted to move in search of fresh conversation.

Very surprising to the minds of landsmen as well as ladies was the weekly inspection of the cabins.

"Why are we having smart table-covers in the saloon to-day?" asked Alice of Mrs. Redmayne as they came down after the short morning prayer on deck.

"It's the day for inspecting the ship, Dick says, and our cabins must be in perfect order."

"But they don't go in there, do they?" said Alice, in extreme astonishment.

"Oh, yes; and the captain is very particular. Dick says it's a most needful arrangement; but it sounds odd."

"And it looks comical. See, there's a regular procession forming, and the faces are as stern as though the fate of the vessel hung on the next five minutes."

As she spoke, Captain Rule, the first lieutenant, the chief doctor, the Colonel of the —th, and the officers on duty, with one or two others, who took this opportunity of seeing their floating home, started on their tour, wearing a most judicial air.

They marched into every cabin in turn, and then proceeded over the rest of the ship. It was easy to see, from the gloom on the Captain's brow when the inspection was over, that all was not as it should be. In due time the ladies were informed that their cloaks must be removed from the hooks on their door, and Ensign Stumps was severely reprimanded for leaving his portmanteau on his berth, when he hurried up to breakfast.

"What is the use of hooks, if we mayn't use them? It is really putting temptation in one's way!" said Alice to the first-lieutenant, a cheery, chatty sailor, of a different type from the Captain.

"Use them, of course, Mrs. Ainsworth," he replied. "They're yours all the rest of the week, only put the cloaks away on inspection morning."

"Oh! is that the sort of obedience required?"

"It's all that can be expected. The Captain's a martinet, you know, and we can't help ourselves. I have a brother on board another trooper, the *Bengal*, and it's a very different affair there."

"How so? Don't they have inspections?"

"Oh! dear, yes; and I think you must acknowledge that your attendants need discipline; but in the *Bengal* they manage more pleasantly, so the passengers try to please the Captain. One can't get man-of-war discipline in a ship like this."

The redoubtable Bay had behaved somewhat unkindly to the travellers, and it was with great de-

light that they hailed the bright sunshine and blue waters of the Mediterranean. It was pleasantly warm on deck, and the ladies grouped themselves in the only spot where their easy-chairs were allowed, and gazed admiringly at the coast. A few ripples crested the water here and there, and a flock of gulls swept in low flights about the stern, dipping occasionally when a shred of anything eatable floated past. Lazy contentment was visible on every face on board, and books were in great request. Suddenly a bell clanged harshly and rapidly on the air, followed by a loud bugle.

In an instant every man sprang up, cigars and books were chucked away, and each hurried off in obedience to the summons, while an exclamation of "Fire-quarters!" struck terror to Alice's heart.

"Oh! where is my baby?" she exclaimed; but, even as she spoke, the first lieutenant dashed past, and called out,

"It's only a parade, ladies; don't be frightened."

As if by magic, armed sentries sprang up beside the boats, and sailors ran forward with hose, while the paymaster hastened up, saying sharply,

"Ladies and children to the saloon! I suppose no one has read the orders, though they're hung up on purpose."

Away went the bewildered ladies into the saloon, where every port was closed and darkened, and there they passed some uncomfortable minutes till

the stewards re-admitted the light, and the parade was over.

Harcourt, coming to search for them, said indignantly that they ought to have been warned beforehand.

"I think so indeed," returned Mrs. Redmayne, who was startled at Alice's deathly paleness.

"It is usually done," said he, "and certainly, though it is necessary to see that we know our duty, there's no occasion to frighten you all."

"Ah well," said Alice with a sigh, "one has the comfort of knowing that everyone is ready if there were a fire. Pray let us go back to the sunshine and forget the alarm."

But the sunshine was less bright, and "cat's-paws" were seen here and there, while the brilliant blue of the water was turning to steely grey.

The fair Mediterranean is as changeable as a coquette, and ruffles as quickly as she smiles. In a couple of hours it was blowing a gale, and the *Burmah* was rolling heavily, while every few minutes broad splashes of water began to invade the decks. Ladies, children, and many of the gentlemen crowded downstairs, and as the skylights and ports were closed, the heat soon became insufferable. Some played bezique, some lay on the sofas and grumbled, some hid themselves in the doleful darkness of their cabins.

Saddest of all the sufferers in the lady's cabin

was Mrs. Darcy Rich, the wife of a gay Lancer on board. Her toilette had been the source of much amusement and gossip, for it was performed at unexpected hours, and in the most retired corners.

Feminine criticism whispered that there were mysteries she would fain conceal.

"Who was she?" "Did she paint?" "Was *all* her hair false?" "Wasn't the way she flirted too dreadful?" These and similar questions were eagerly debated.

It was certain this was her second marriage, some said her third; she was supposed to have been a shop-girl; if so, she must have been in a perfumer's, for only well-accustomed noses could stand the scents that pervaded her clothes and poured out their odours whenever she opened a trunk.

Poor Mrs. Rich! Her worst enemy might have pitied her on the afternoon of the gale. Stretched helplessly on her berth—a sofa berth, with no curtains to hide her sufferings—a round red patch contrasting painfully with the green pallor of either cheek, her elaborate *chevelure* disordered and disconnected, the spectacle of her woes provoked an irresistible smile on faces innocent of rouge.

The children were far less miserable than their seniors; only one or two of them were sea-sick, and the rest played contentedly in the lower saloon. Baby Cecil and the little Redmaynes were happily established there, and the mothers began to long

for a breath of fresh air, even at the risk of a wetting. Holding on to the hand-rails, they climbed cautiously up to the quarter-deck, and were congratulated by the gentlemen who were still braving the weather.

"You're quite right to come up," said Major Martyn; "the waves are worth seeing. One swept the deck across a few minutes ago."

"It is grand," said Alice, looking with sparkling eyes at the foaming water; and the old Major, pleased with her fearlessness, wrapped a shawl round her, and placed her by the companion, where she was less likely to get wet, while Mrs. Redmayne held on vigorously to a rail.

Now the captain of the *Burmah* had been ordered to economise his coal, and the vessel was only going seven knots. Gales fly fast on their course, and the waves curled higher and higher behind the lagging ship. Once or twice it seemed as though a great crest would break on to the deck, but at the critical moment it slid away, and passed underneath. At last a green wall rose astern, sharp and strong against the sky; there was a crash, the stern boat was in splinters, the water poured roaring down the tall ventilators, and the gentlemen were swept along the deck, and thrown bruised and breathless against the masts and benches.

"Pooped, by Jove!" exclaimed Major Martyn, hurrying forward and assisting an officer to pick

himself out of a coil of rope into which he had pitched head first. Happily, there were no serious hurts, though there were plenty of bruises; but after this warning the vessel was sent along at greater speed.

It was impossible to make Malta harbour in such a storm, and the *Burmah* had to remain outside for the night. Dinner was on the table when the process of "laying to" commenced, and the Admiralty must in consequence have had a large account for broken china.

Each roll of the vessel, broadside to the waves, was accompanied by the crash of falling dishes, that no precautions could secure. The tablecloth was deluged with liquids of various sorts, screams issued from a cabin where trunks were rolling from side to side, and the uproar was crowned by a general roar of laughter when, in spite of desperate efforts to keep his balance, a steward and a roast goose disappeared together under the table.

Ere morning the storm had exhausted itself, and the *Burmah* was safely anchored in the harbour, nor did any further mishaps befall her as she proceeded onward into the wondrous calm of the Tropics.

For Alice the most trying time of the day was that between the early dinner and tea. It soon grew too dark for any occupation on deck, yet everyone shrank from the steamy and odoriferous heat below, and by common consent this period was

devoted to exercise. Husbands and wives—most of whom were in separate cabins—paced the deck arm in arm, or enjoyed a quiet chat, leaning over the side.

The bachelors, in twos and threes, strode up and down, or gathered in groups in the narrow space where smoking was allowed. It was a pleasant time, and when the pale phosphorescence was gleaming on the sea, the strollers would often linger till it was close on the hour for putting out the lights. There were numerous officers and ladies on board besides those of the —th, but in all that crowd there seemed to be but one lonely creature, and that one was Mrs. Ainsworth.

After putting little Cecil to bed, she would come up and look timidly round for her husband, but he was invariably among the smokers, so she would creep away, and stand at the side alone, till the Redmaynes asked her to join them, or till some gentleman came and spoke to her.

Harcourt always saw when she made her appearance, and longed to go to her at once, but he knew the humours of such a company too well to make his attentions in any way noticeable. One night, when he had loitered near the companion, so as to meet her, he saw that she was more than usually troubled.

"Where is Robert, Captain Harcourt?" she began.

"Smoking. Shall I fetch him, or will you take a turn with me first? I hope nothing is wrong?"

"Not much. Cecil is not very well. This life does not suit her, or me either. I do so long to be alone, and yet one is so horrible alone in this crowd."

"I know exactly what you mean. You are tired to-night. Wait while I fetch a shawl, and you shall sit down in a corner you have not tried yet."

The corner was the little platform from which the gangway descends, and there Alice was soon made tolerably comfortable.

"Now, Mrs. Ainsworth, I'm not going to talk to you. I like peace as much as you do, so I shall stand here, and see that no one walks over you."

He leant against the side, just distinguishing the delicate profile against the water that glittered in the spaces of the railing behind her. How hard it was at times like this to refrain from any expression of sympathy greater than she would naturally have expected from him!—how hard, when he knew instinctively what she felt, not to soothe her, as he could have done—ah, so easily! He heard her sigh the long sigh of utter weariness, and he grasped the rail nervously as he listened.

Presently the sweet voice broke the silence.

"How beautiful the trail of light is on the water to-night!"

"Yes. 'With wakes of fire we tore the dark.' There could not be a truer description."

"Your quotations are always apt. I never remember things at the right moment."

"But I daresay the ideas fit together in your mind. I know you have stores of quotations, like the bits of colour in a kaleidoscope. They only want moving into their places."

"Ah, I had a kaleidoscope that I was very fond of when I was a child; but it got out of order, and three ugly bits of black cork constantly spoilt the patterns. There's a good deal of black in my mental kaleidoscope."

"Is there? Can no skilled hand set the instrument straight?"

"How can I tell? Skilled hands seem to be very few, as far as I see."

He had never heard her speak in so bitter a tone before, and it steadied him, for it gave him something to do.

"Mrs. Ainsworth, I am very unskilled, but you know I would help you, if I could, to mend any sort of kaleidoscope you care for. Can I not do it?"

"I think you are always ready to help anyone in trouble. I feel ashamed of mine; it is so slight, and yet it is not slight to me," she continued, her voice trembling. "Captain Harcourt, we have been a fortnight on board, and only twice has my husband come near me at this hour, when all the others——"

"It is very thoughtless of him. You see, he has made this voyage before, and he falls into his old ways, and forgets there is anyone depending on him."

"I daresay it is that, but he ought to think."

"I know he ought. Will you forgive me if I make a suggestion?"

"Forgive you for trying to mend the kaleidoscope! You need not ask such a question. Do you know, my aunt once said she would trust you if she needed a friend—I need one now. Tell me what to do. How am I to know what is most likely to influence a man's mind? I could understand a woman's."

"I fear some of us are very careless about the amenities of life. We are so naturally, and soldiering roughens us. I was going to say that I think you should speak to Robert quietly, by that I mean judicially; do you understand?"

"Yes; you mean I am not to show how much I feel the question."

"Exactly. I think if you pointed out to him that he exposes you both to remark—I hardly like to say it."

"Do you think I do not see it?"

"Well, tell him so, and say that you wish him, for that reason, to join you for part of the evening."

"I will. Thanks for the suggestion. I am afraid should have been less wise if left to myself."

"Shall I fetch him? I can easily say you are tired and asked me to look for him."

"I suppose I had better speak at once. Good night. I shall go down after I have seen him. Thank you very much."

If, as I think, self-control is the germ out of which heroism springs, Harcourt was near winning honours that night. Not by the tone of his voice or the touch of his hand did he go a hair's breadth beyond the line he had laid down for himself, and it was perhaps even more to his credit that he compelled himself to speak exactly in his usual way to Ainsworth.

"Here, Ainsworth, your wife wants to speak to you; she seems awfully tired to-night. It must be infernal work down in that cabin. She's by the gangway there."

"What's wrong, Alice? Harcourt says you're knocked up," began Ainsworth, not ungently.

"I am very tired, and baby is not looking well. But, Robert, I wanted to ask you to come and walk with me sometimes of an evening; you never do it."

"I never know when you come upstairs. I can't wait here till you do come, and when I see you, you're generally with the Redmaynes or some one."

"They are very good-natured in asking me to join them, but other husbands and wives like to be left to themselves. Robert, do you never want to come and talk to me?"

"What the deuce is there to talk about! Why don't you come for me, if you want me?"

"You yourself told me it was absurd to see how some of the ladies go about hunting for their husbands. Besides, I do not like to go right through this crowd of gentlemen to the far end where you smoke. You could easily be hereabouts if you chose, for I always come about the same hour."

"And it's just when I like to smoke. However, I'll try to look for you sometimes, if you can't manage without it. It seems to me you're making a fuss about nothing."

"As you choose; only people make remarks, and I thought you wished to keep up appearances. I don't want to make a victim of you, dear. Good night."

"D——n other people! What business is it of theirs? I wish to goodness one could manage one's own affairs without being noticed. Good night. Don't wear yourself out with that brat."

Alice felt, as she went downstairs, that she had carried her point by her last remark. The recommendation to spare herself was well meant too, however impossible to carry out; but she questioned whether, after all, the gain was worth the consequences to herself. Every little discussion of this sort widened the breach that was yawning between her and her husband, and, save for appearance sake, she wished she had not made her request. Still it

was perhaps best to prevent comments as far as possible, and she had already overheard Major Bellaire say with a sneer, "The Diver takes matrimony pretty easy, doesn't he?"

She acknowledged to herself that Ainsworth did not deliberately mean to be unkind, but, if he had meant it, he could not have galled her more constantly. Even bad temper could only have shown itself at intervals, and she fancied she could have faced a storm quietly, had she known that the sun would shine after the clouds had dispersed, but her husband's indifference was a continual trial.

The truth was, he never thought of how matters looked from her point of view—never cared to indulge in any of the passing kindlinesses that make existence a gracious thing. He had married her because he wished it, and he left her to herself for the same reason. He could go his own way without her, and it never occurred to him that she might not be able to go hers with equal ease. Such division of interests would have been trying to any woman, but to one of Alice's clinging disposition it entailed absolute misery.

In consequence of her remarks, her husband made a point of occasionally taking a constitutional with her on deck, but these *tête-à-tête* walks bored him almost as much as they grieved her. Ship-life is not fruitful in ideas. It affords opportunities for those who have any intellectual stores to unlock

their cabinet, and display the contents; but it brings desolation and woe on the many whose brains are filled with the cobwebs of indolence and the dust of idleness.

To pace up and down with a silent companion, your minds bent solely on threading the crowd without being jostled, is an amusement that speedily palls. Very soon Ainsworth would ask his wife if she would not like to sit down; sometimes it was she who suggested that he should go and smoke.

The right thing, however, had been done, and the duty over, she turned with greater zest to other society. Before long people discovered that she could converse as well as listen, and pleasant groups began to form around her in the corner where she usually secured a place. There Harcourt was always to be found, and Alice never knew how skilfully he often led the talk to topics on which he knew her to be well informed.

One night he was called away on duty, and a lady sitting by Alice inquired how he had won his Victoria Cross. Before she could reply, Major Martyn spoke.

"I think I should answer that, for I was present. It was in the Crimea. The skirmishers were ordered to retire. As they came in, a fine young lad fell at Harcourt's side, badly hit. Cecil picked the boy up, and carried him. There were Cossacks coming up, and you know what their tender mercies are.

Before he had gone far two of them were close. We were hesitating, afraid to fire, but Cecil put the boy gently down, and lay down beside him. You may suppose we blazed at the fellows. One dropped, the other had his horse shot, but got off somehow himself, and ran on. Cecil just raised himself on his elbow, picked him off with his revolver, and carried the lad in. It was all over in less time than it takes to tell it. All he said was, he would have tackled them himself had they been on foot, but he didn't think his revolver bullets would stop a horse."

"By Jove! He earned his Cross!" was the general exclamation. Captain Redmayne, always enthusiastic about his favourite, took up the theme.

"I saw him do a thing as fine in its way, though more a matter of course. It was the manner in which he did it, made one notice it. We were part of a flying column after the mutiny, and one day we had had a long march and a skirmish. We were dead beat, and there was neither food nor drink to be got. By some fluke a single cart of stuff came up, and Cecil brought one bottle of soda to my tent. He had had a touch of fever, and was choked with dust. Just as he was drawing the cork, two wounded men passed, going to the hospital. One of them begged for a mouthful, and got it, the second asked too, and, surly brute that he was, he drained it every drop. 'You've lots more, I daresay, sir,' said he. 'The officers are sure to get it.' 'I haven't tasted

anything since morning,' replied Harcourt quietly; 'but I'm not hit, so you're welcome.' The man looked a bit ashamed, but the other one apologized, saying the fellow had been touched by the sun, and that he was downright sorry. Harcourt just said, 'Oh! never mind, I don't believe he could stop when he began.' And then he turned in and lay down. I went off to forage for more, but I confess I didn't keep my temper as well."

"Was that Harcourt?" exclaimed a young subaltern of another regiment. "To be sure; I never thought of it before, though I knew it was one of the —th. The man that apologised was my servant at the depôt, and I can tell you he has never forgotten the story."

Alice did not say a word, but she began to perceive that actions such as these are blossoms that can only be borne by deep-rooted tolerance and self-restraint.

Even voyages end at last, and so does the progress of a regiment up-country in India, although it is wearisomely slow.

There are periods when the hours, instead of wearing winged sandals, move at the pace of the tortoise, when minutes weigh like lead, and dull days crawl into restless nights. Such a time remains graven on the memory like a nightmare, and in this light Alice looked back on the prolonged journeying of the —th. Days of dust and heat, of scant space

and tiresome waiting in sidings, where troop-trains spend hour after hour; nights of lesser dust and heat, but of other varieties of discomfort. Meals snatched at railway-stations, and by way of a rest, Sundays spent now and again in a standing camp, with neither knowledge nor materials to make camp comfortable; this was what she had to endure. Her friends did what they could for her, and fortunately she and Mrs. Redmayne were accommodated in one compartment, so that she was spared a good deal of her husband's grumbling. As long as the baby remained in good health she bore her own discomforts cheerfully, and even found occupation in watching the effect of small vexations on her neighbours.

Every shade of character was exhibited, and it must be confessed, only a minority came badly out of the ordeal.

Alice learnt to recognise the confirmed grumbler for whom nothing is right, and the light heart that takes life as it comes, and can always say, "things might have been worse."

She knew the old traveller who looks out steadily for what he wants and pushes his way through the crowd, careless as to who is jostled by his sturdy elbows. He fared well, and that, after all, is what concerns a man most. He could afford, while finishing his pudding at dinner (he always had time for sweets), to wonder calmly at the man who was

still hunting feebly for the mustard, without which he could not make up his mind to begin.

That man was singled out by Fate for misfortune. It was depressing to think of the bad dinners he ate, the luggage he mislaid or lost, the frightful prices he paid, the uncomfortable corners in which he slept. By way of compensation, he never quite overtook full consciousness of one mishap ere another had driven the first out of his head. The loss of his keys to-day prevented his regretting the pillow he left behind yesterday. His friends, who thought more quickly, suffered more on his account than he did on his own.

Everyone was thankful to reach the station of Hazrabagh, where the regiment was to be quartered. It was a pretty enough place, as Indian stations go, greener and somewhat less formal than most of those in the plains. The train arrived early in the morning, and the travellers' impressions were all the pleasanter that they found a band waiting to play them into cantonments, and several officers ready to provide breakfasts, and other creature comforts.

The Commissioner and his wife bore off Mrs. Redmayne and Alice to their abode in the civil lines, and the latter, ignorant of Indian hospitality, was amazed to find herself so welcomed and cared for by a stranger.

She saw later that Mr. and Mrs. Goodwood were of the best school of Indian civilians. That is to

say, they being recognized heads of society in an enormous district, valued their position for the sake of the pleasure they could give, not on account of the dignity they might boast.

Thoroughly did the travellers appreciate the cool, pretty house, the tasteful breakfast-table, the perfect quiet, the noiseless servants, some clad in the usual white, some in official scarlet. Alice shrank for a foolish moment from entrusting tiny Cecil to the black hands of an ayah, but Mrs. Redmayne smiled away her dislike, and insisted that she should enjoy a few hours of complete repose.

There was no time to be lost before securing houses, and that afternoon the two ladies set out with their hostess in search of them. The sight of the Commissioner's carriage quickened the movements of the landlords, for there is no more devoted worshipper of rank on earth than the Hindoo.

The Ainsworths took a little bungalow half way between the Mess and the Redmaynes, and the next few days were spent in getting necessaries, still under Mrs. Goodwood's care.

Alice began at once to learn the language by ear, and her husband had not entirely forgotten it, so in this respect they were better off than some of their neighbours. Of course, there were accidents and blunders enough, but none of these could destroy Alice's delight on taking possession of a house of her own. She had always feared her landlady,

and though her lodgings had been comfortable, there was a pride of ownership about this Indian home such as only a woman can fully comprehend.

Ainsworth in a modified degree enjoyed the process of settling down. It amused him to sit and smoke, while the natives unpacked and arranged his property, and, as he said, "A barn would be pleasant, after one has lived in one's portmanteau for weeks."

Their bungalow was tolerably comfortable, containing three good rooms and sundry small ones. Their height, and the consequent expanse of white-washed wall, was startling at first, but the eye soon grew accustomed to it. It was more difficult for Alice to tolerate the scant furniture and absence of draperies, but she was assured that, with the hot weather approaching, a wise housekeeper would buy nothing that could harbour mosquitos. She did not know that to others her own presence brightened the bare house, and speedily attracted visitors from the regiment.

Indian etiquette, which is as merciless as Indian hospitality is unbounded, allows no resident to visit a new-comer till the latter has called, and, so to speak, invited inspection. If Grey tells you Mrs. Brown is coming, and you therefore choose to meet her at the station, and act towards her the part of a kindly hostess, you must none the less wait frigidly for poor, bewildered Mrs. Jones to call on you be-

fore you extend the hand of friendship. This being the case, no strangers, except the Goodwoods, crossed the Ainsworths' threshold, for as yet Alice was too busy to run the gauntlet of Hazrabagh society. She saw that the effort must be made before long, for her husband speedily showed signs of boredom.

A very short time had sufficed for the arrangement of the little bungalow, and a head servant of Mrs. Goodwood's choosing managed the other natives, so that the domestic machinery worked with tolerable ease. This was perhaps scarcely an unmixed blessing, since monotony was the great bugbear of the master of the house. Even a quarrel may be a desirable change when a man has no resources of his own. It was not yet hot enough for afternoon whist, that *acme* of Indian idleness. Ainsworth hated croquet and riding-parties, and was driven to lounge away the afternoons wearily, reading novels, and consuming brandy and soda.

No wonder he complained that life was infernally dull. There were some who thought that the presence of its mistress might well have ensured cheerfulness in his house.

"Just stop an instant; isn't that a picture!" exclaimed Harcourt, as he crossed the half-cultivated patch of ground that the Ainsworths' landlord called a garden.

"I must confess it is; the Diver's a lucky fellow," returned Major Martyn, who accompanied him.

In one corner of the deep verandah were some low chairs, and a tiny table on which a pretty tea-service was ready. On the fresh yellow matting lay piles of Indian shawls and gold and coloured embroidery, displayed by a stately Cashmeree in grey coat and dark blue turban. His brown-skinned attendants crouched against the outer wall, and spoke furtively to the white-robed ayah who was carrying the baby up and down.

Her bright hair framed in the shadow of the doorway stood Alice, an amused smile on her face as she assured Abdul Khan, in broken Hindostani, that she did not require any of his gorgeous wares.

"What an obstinate man this is," said she laughingly, as the gentlemen came forward. "Do all natives require to be told a dozen times that one wants nothing?"

"As long as you are in sight there is hope, Mrs. Ainsworth. He understands all you say."

"Not really? I thought they knew so little English."

"Watch his face," said Harcourt in French, and continued in English. "They know more than they confess. A friend of mine had a servant who vowed he knew no English at all. His master was keeping house for three others. The food was shocking, and one day the tea was too horrible. 'I believe that

scoundrel has boiled the tea, milk, and sugar all together,' said my friend. 'Oh, no, master, no sugar I put,' quoth the man, and then looked rather an ass. That's a good story, isn't it? and it's true," he added abruptly to Abdul, whose mouth betrayed him, though he went on folding up his shawls.

"Master been in Hindostan before," he replied quietly, and with a very good accent; "the Mem Sahib new come. Now master know that choga very good thing, he better buy this one."

"You see he turns everything to account, even my knowledge of his ways. That's the true Eastern; they deserve some success, for their ingenuity never fails them."

As the trio sat down to tea the Goodwoods drove up and joined them; they came to invite Alice to a dance they proposed giving as a further welcome to the —th, and she, nothing loth, accepted. Mrs. Goodwood also volunteered to take her to some of the houses where she was bound to call; the rest she visited along with the Redmaynes, and thus the ordeal proved less severe than she had anticipated.

A good Indian ball is an extremely pretty thing, even although the floor and the music do not come up to European standards. The wide verandahs hung with coloured paper lanterns, the tents that give additional space, the graceful palm-leaves and glowing pointsettia, that often form part of the decorations, the variety of quaint and showy uniforms,

above all the impunity with which the dancers stroll into the open air, are strong points in its favour. Even the dusty road is rendered picturesque by the double row of flaming torches that mark it out clearly in the darkness. Alice was delighted with the whole scene, and her admiration of all that was new to her in the arrangements was only equalled by her surprise when she found her card filled in ten minutes, and requests being made for "extras."

Ladies have no proper idea of their own value till they have been in a region where the gentlemen outnumber them by five to one. Dull or heavy-footed indeed must dame or damsel be who cannot find partners enough and to spare in such circumstances. When a woman is young, pretty, well-dressed, and, best of all, straight from home, she creates a furore of which her sisters in Europe can form no idea. Harcourt had been wise enough to bespeak his share of dances beforehand, and waited patiently by the cloak-room door with his card. It was well that he did so, for, left to herself, Alice would have been helplessly confused by the novelty of the whole affair. Ainsworth saw that she was the great attraction of the evening, and felt a certain pride of ownership that he had not known before. The night was not without its pleasures for him also; he had dined well at a neighbouring Mess, won a rubber, thought he saw his way to systematic whist during the hot weather, and had heard that Captain

Brabazon's battery was ordered to Hazrabagh. He had not forgotten how cavalierly Mrs. Brabazon had treated him in Dublin, but he did not therefore greatly disturb himself. Women's fancies are short-lived, and in the daily familiarity of Indian life, he thought she must certainly prove a piquant and inspiriting companion. One or two old acquaintances turned up at the ball, and by the time supper was over he had had quite enough of Mr. Goodwood's undeniable champagne.

Everybody knows that quite enough does not mean exactly the same as too much, though "everybody" is not equally clear as to the precise line of distinction. Harcourt and Ainsworth, for example, viewed it differently, and the former was apt to express himself decidedly on the subject. The other once regretted a foolish speech of Major Bellaire's, but excused it as an after-dinner remark.

"Exactly," retorted Harcourt, "when it is hard to say if the animal or the fool predominates. Either way, *in vino veritas*."

Alice was far too innocent of such things to understand the disagreeable expression on her husband's face, or Harcourt's evident unwillingness to surrender her to him, when at a late hour the party broke up.

Ainsworth took his place on the box of the carriage, and on reaching the house threw himself

heavily into an arm-chair, and called for a brandy and soda.

"You looked uncommon well to-night, Alice," said he, catching her arm as she undid her opera-cloak, and drawing her to him. "I had no idea you would ever have made such a sensation."

"It's extraordinary, I think," she replied, "but I enjoyed myself very much. I'm glad you like my dress, Robert."

"It's first-rate, my dear—suits you well. I say, Alice, I like to see you getting on like that—I like to think that the girl everybody's running after belongs to me. You do, you know—you belong to me, body and soul."

The tone, the face, the confused words, struck Alice with a sudden indescribable horror.

"Let me go, Robert—I hear the baby!" she cried, though the excuse was fictitious.

"Confound that brat!—you're always with it! Can't you stop here?" said Ainsworth, sulkily; but she did not heed. She snatched her hand from his loosening grasp, and flew to the nursery, where she stayed trembling for an hour. She knew now what had happened, and indignation was for the moment stronger than regret. "Belonged to him," she thought; the phrase might be true in one sense, but not as he had used it. Brain, heart, soul were her own, and would remain so. These are beyond the

reach of law. And yet there rose up before her a vision of the dim old parish church at home. She saw again a crimson ray shine through the stained window on the clergyman's grey hair as she promised to love, honour, and obey; she shuddered to think that that vow was binding. To obey was easy, but the others——When she gave her promise, she believed the love and honour were deserved; the keeping of it meant this, that she should honour a man who had not honoured truth, and love him, though his life was unlovely. From this dilemma she saw no escape, and as she crept wearied and heart-sick to her room, her burden seemed well-nigh unbearable. She was to learn that she could carry a heavier one.

Sleep is a wonderful comforter, and Alice was more hopeful when she rose. The sight of little Cecil's baby face always cheered her, and she had still the variability of youth. She could shake off dreary thoughts for a while, and even enjoy the recollection of her last night's success. In fact, troubles equalize themselves wonderfully for us; youth is elastic, though the vista of years appears interminable at two and twenty, if sorrow shadows the path. At two and thirty we cannot shake off our griefs as quickly, but then we know that only the shortest part of our journey remains to be accomplished. But for this consciousness, some of us would hardly stand so calm and erect in the ranks.

Alice was soon to be left to her own resources, for the hot weather was approaching.

In another month the Goodwoods would be off to the hills, and there also the Redmaynes would spend their leave, till the middle of June. Ainsworth had not suffered from the heat during his previous stay in India, so he decided not to take leave till August, and desired his wife to learn all the precautions by which the hot months could be made less unendurable. She, meantime, entered feverishly into the concluding gaieties of the season.

She felt that a loveless home is a mere shelter, not a home, and that excitement has power over an empty heart, just as a vessel without ballast is the sport of every wind. Similar temptation had assailed Maud Brabazon, but circumstances had sided against her, and in favour of Alice. No guardian angel in child-form had hallowed Maud's house, and so, where she had grown bitter, and almost unwomanly, Alice retained her sweetness, and only threw herself more eagerly than was natural to her into the amusements that kept her from thought.

One afternoon, as she and her husband were riding home after a luncheon party, he for the first time mentioned the dreaded subject of the Brabazons.

"I hear the battery will be in in a couple of days, or so, Alice. I shall meet them, and bring the

Brabazons to our house, and they can stay with us till they find one."

"Stay with us! Is that necessary?"

"Certainly. You wouldn't have them go to the dak bungalow, would you? Why shouldn't they stay with us? I can easily pitch a tent in the compound."

"Because—I do not like Mrs. Brabazon!"

"Well, I must say it's hard if your dislikes are to prevent my seeing my friends in my own house. It's the first time I've ever asked you to entertain anyone. I've had Mrs. Redmayne and Mrs. Goodwood often enough in the house, just to please you."

"I think even you know that they and their husbands are a very different stamp from your friends, and they have never stayed in the house, so they can't have bored you so very much. Of course the Brabazons must come if you wish it."

"I do wish it; and I shall probably see a good deal of them, if we make him one of our whist party."

Alice said nothing, but she leapt her horse into an adjoining field and cantered home alone; nor did Ainsworth renew the subject. The battery arrived, and the day proved less trying than Mrs. Ainsworth had anticipated. Her hospitable nature was touched by the tired look on Maud's face, and her evident gratitude for her unexpected reception. The visit too was short, for Captain Brabazon had taken house

and furniture from an out-going officer, so that there was little time for conversation. Last, but by no means least, Alice's woman-wit speedily discerned a change of manner both in her husband and her guest. Ignorant of all that had passed in Dublin during her stay at the Red Hall, she concluded that this mutual indifference was the result of absence. On the lady's side it appeared genuine, on Ainsworth's she could hardly think it assumed. It did not occur to her that in the very sincerity of Maud's coolness lay the germ of fresh danger, for to some men blossom or fruit is valuable only as long as it hangs out of reach.

The station was quick to remark on the addition to its society, and at the —th Mess croquet, where Mrs. Brabazon made her first appearance, numbers of gentlemen begged to be introduced to her. They held but one opinion as to her beauty and style, but other views were expressed by the row of fair judges in muslin robes, who sat under the tamarisk-trees at the side of the ground. Perhaps, however, she might have come unscathed through even that ordeal of criticism, had she not attracted the attention of the most eligible and agreeable bachelor in the place.

Mr. Lingard was about five-and-thirty, a Deputy Commissioner, sure to rise in the service, good-tempered and most obliging.

No one else sent out so many of the baskets of flowers and vegetables prized by Indian housekeepers,

no one so readily lent a horse or gave a lift to a friend, no one, save Mr. Goodwood himself, was so clever at arranging breakfast parties and other entertainments. No wonder he was sought after, no wonder that the three young ladies, whose presence was the boast of the station, had always a dance to spare for Mr. Lingard, however late he came.

To Mrs. Brabazon, ignorant of his rank and merits, he appeared to be merely a somewhat prepossessing young man, and as he did not begin his conversation with the stereotyped phrase, "How do you like India?" she was ready to chat with him in the pauses of the game.

Very soon the *fiat* of the judges had gone forth. Portly Mrs. Rumbold, peering through double eyeglasses, remarked to her neighbour,

"That stranger from the new battery—what is her name, my dear?—seems to be a curious person. Very bad taste of a new-comer to monopolise the gentlemen's attention in that way?"

"Shocking, isn't it?" sighed Mrs. Doleman, the languid mother of a stolid daughter, "and with three girls on the ground, too. I think really she ought to come and sit down."

"Do you?" said little Mrs. Pippett, with a shrug of her shoulders. Those shoulders had been pretty six years ago—perhaps that was the reason that she still displayed so much of them below her clear muslin dress. "I don't see why she should. I think

the men far more amusing than women, and I dare-say she does the same. It's very wrong to say so, of course, though we all know it's true."

"I'm afraid she looks decidedly fast," said Mrs. Rumbold, turning a deaf ear to indiscreet Mrs. Pippett, whose flirtations were sufficiently well known. "What a figure she has, too! I never liked those dresses made to fit like riding-habits, did you?"

"Oh dear, no; I'm told they are not worn by very *com-il-fo* people. How much nicer your daughter looks, Mrs. Rumbold!"

"That dress of hers is more to my taste; but Miss Doleman's is *so* nice, too. I think Hazrabagh has reason to be proud of its three young ladies."

"Yes, but it would be better if some of them ceased to be 'spins.' It's said that Mr. Lingard ought to make up his mind. We all know where he goes oftenest to chota haziri * and tea."

So chattered the judges, stabbing each other with tiny darts, as is their way. Did not Mrs. Doleman know that the "nice" dress her daughter wore was a piqué that betrayed too frequent washing? Did she not feel that she had repaid Mrs. Rumbold's thrust with interest, when she insinuated that Mr. Lingard was trifling with her Bertha? Did not both ladies know in their hearts that they would have given much to be able to wear the plain silk that showed the curves of Maud's grand figure so

* Literally, "little breakfast."

well? There must be some hidden zest about this covert skirmishing that makes it dear to the feminine heart; perhaps it is a feeling akin to the pugnacity that causes schoolboys to rejoice in a "mill." Unhappily, the wasp sting continues to fester when the blow given straight from the shoulder has long been forgotten. Many a friendship, too, has grown out of a boyish fight, but no good ever came of a woman's war of words.

When the croquet was over, and ices and coffee were being handed, Maud took in the position at a glance, and moved slowly to where Captain Harcourt was standing.

"Who is the gentleman who played with me? A very great man, is he not?"

"Yes, the Deputy Commissioner, Lingard; but how on earth did you know?"

"Oh! I saw the flutter among the *chaperons* as we came up to them, and I heard their fervent hopes that he had had a pleasant game."

"You are quite right," said Harcourt, laughing; "but I do not suppose you care."

"Yes, I do," she replied gravely. "I want to behave with as much discretion here as I can. There are reasons why it behoves me to do so. Can you introduce me to some woman with whom I can get on?"

"Certainly, if you will come over here. The Commissioner's wife is well worth cultivating."

It was music to Maud's ears when she heard herself introduced as "an old friend of mine," and as Mrs. Goodwood very soon asked her to come to a riding-party and dinner, without going through the formality of a previous call, it is to be supposed she showed herself at her best. These riding-parties were always successes, and were reserved by the Goodwoods for people they really liked.

Official entertaining they did well and cheerfully, but it was in a small party of friends that they were most appreciated. At this time of year they would ask six or eight people to ride down quietly to afternoon tea; when it became pleasantly cool they would choose a leader, and follow him across country, returning home at dusk. Some of the visitors dined in their riding-costume, and returned home on horseback, others preferred to dress, and drive or walk home, after an evening, spent in music or billiards.

On these occasions no formalities were allowed. Mrs. Goodwood had even been known to disregard etiquette, and pair her guests according to their tastes, rather than their rank. Such a proceeding scandalised the outside world, but when some one remonstrated with the little lady, she said she only did it to people who were above being dignified. The reply was incomprehensible to the questioner, but for that reason silenced her completely.

Maud, mounted on a handsome bay charger of

her husband's, felt her spirits rising as she saw the little gathering at the Goodwoods' door. Mrs. Ainsworth, Captain Harcourt, Mr. Lingard, an officer of the native cavalry, Beecham by name, and the host and hostess, made up the party. Mr. Beecham being requested to lead, he and Mrs. Goodwood trotted on by a winding path leading through fields to the open plain. Mr. Goodwood and Alice followed, and the other gentlemen escorted Maud.

"What were your first impressions of Hazrabagh, Mrs. Brabazon?" inquired Lingard.

"Do you mean of the place or the people?"

"I meant your impressions of the society at the croquet party. All the station was there."

"Our hostess is charming."

"That is rather a limited reply, though very true as far as it goes."

"Mrs. Brabazon is afraid of committing herself, Lingard. You should confess that you are not partial to the place yourself."

"Harcourt has heard my views in very plain language, Mrs. Brabazon. If you agree, we may enjoy a grumble together. It always does me good to have one."

"Then I will be honest. I thought it dreadful yesterday, with one or two saving exceptions," said Maud.

"I trust I am one. Now tell me, what is it strikes a new-comer like you most forcibly? I began

my Indian life in such a different place that I can't in the least tell."

"Two things struck me most—formalities and personalities."

"Ah, that last is the curse of India. But we are generally supposed to be free and easy."

"In some ways," said Harcourt, "but I know what Mrs. Brabazon means. People are either extremely easy, or as stiff as though their lives depended on some bit of etiquette."

"Yes, that's true. I wonder why on earth we all get so narrow in our ideas. We certainly do."

"It's the effect of absolute monarchy, Mr. Lingard. You are all kings in a small way, and you are so accustomed to study your rights and actions that you grow angular."

"True again. But Mrs. Brabazon, you have only been a few months in India, and you speak as though you had fathomed all our weaknesses. You alarm me!"

"Remember that most of those months have been spent in a Camp of Exercise. Life there was like a play, and I could not help seeing occasionally behind some of the scenes."

"Tell us some of your experiences then," said Harcourt; "I like glimpses of that sort."

"Most of them were too brief to be worth telling, but I remember one that was comical. There was a dinner at the Lieutenant-Governor's and the—

gentleman—who took me in hardly spoke to me. I never saw anyone so rude or so stupid; of course I didn't know in which way to account for his silence. After dinner, when the gentlemen joined us, he sat down at once by me, beaming and friendly. 'I made quite a mistake at dinner,' he said—'I'm so sorry, I did not know who you were—in fact, I mistook you for the wife of a young subaltern who has just joined the 6th Battery.' The tone in which he spoke explained his meaning, but I wanted him to commit himself further, so I asked if he wished to avoid the lady in question. 'Not at all,' said he, 'but you know, of course, a *subaltern's* wife—no doubt very pleasant—but if she had gone in with me, it would have been such a mistake.'"

"What did you say?" asked Harcourt, "I'm sure you didn't let the fellow off?"

"I trust not," added Lingard.

Maud laughed merrily.

"I didn't say much. I only got up and said I had made a mistake too; he asked what it was, and I said that, being new to India, I made the mistake of supposing that a gentleman would be courteous to any lady, independent of her husband's rank. He never spoke to me again."

"Bravo, Mrs. Brabazon! If more ladies would show the same spirit, there would be less absurdity about official rank among us. I'm afraid, though, the ladies are as bad as we are."

"No doubt; only, if your sex is as strong as you always say, why don't you teach us wisdom? Are we never going out of a walk? I call this talking on horseback, not riding."

"Your pardon. There are some ditches in front of us where we may have a jump or two. Beecham always picks out the worst ground."

"Come, then!" exclaimed Maud, her eyes brightening as she saw the foremost riders clearing a low wall, and for the next few minutes she enjoyed herself thoroughly.

They were crossing a wide plain, where the low sun was shining redly on the stems of a grove of palms, and the young maize was of a green such as is undreamt of under northern skies. Along the edge of the cultivated ground a narrow footpath wound from well to well, and from village to village. Here, groups of peasants were coming slowly homewards, the women, clad in crimson and blue, carrying their brown water-jars on their heads; the men, dusky figures in neutral-coloured garb, leading white oxen from their toil in the fields. Far away before the riders stretched the yellow plain, and on the horizon rose, in a perpendicular wall of palest blue, the mighty hills, so distant, that only for an hour, now and again, did they shine through the haze of heat and sand.

With some difficulty, Harcourt secured a few moments' *tête-à-tête* with Maud.

"May I know what the reasons were to which you alluded yesterday? Remember, I am to help you when you need help."

"You may as well know now as later," said she, with a slight hesitation. After an instant's pause, she continued bitterly—"Captain Brabazon drinks a good deal more than he should. Perhaps you know it already—do you?"

"I had heard a whisper of it."

"Ah! I did not expect it to come out so soon."

"Nor has it. I heard it from a man who had played whist with him. He could not but know it."

"Yes, and therefore I hate the sight of everyone who plays with him. Captain Harcourt, I am sick of my life. I can understand how people commit suicide or murder."

"Hush! You must not forget yourself even to me."

"No, it isn't wise, but I do speak truly to you. Do you think Mrs. Ainsworth could ever be friends with me? I wish it were possible!"

"Mrs. Ainsworth!" exclaimed Harcourt, and paused, startled and wondering.

"Yes. Does it sound so mad a question? You know she received us when we arrived, by her husband's orders, of course. I can't tell you how the sight of her at home touched me. Sentiment isn't in my line, but that gave me a lump in my throat. It was so innocent, so quiet. Could I not find

anchorage in a quiet harbour sometimes, even if it were only for an hour?"

"I wish you could, with all my heart, but——"

"But—what? Surely you are not afraid to trust me. Cannot you see that I am in no mood for playing at flirtation, even if I had not given you a promise."

"I do see, and I don't doubt you for a moment. But pardon me if I say that your being in Mrs. Ainsworth's house might—I do not say it would—make her unhappy. You know her husband's capacity for blundering."

"If that's your only reason, I can make it all right. He is to play whist at our house, and no power shall induce me to assist at those parties again. You won't grudge my trying for an anchorage then, will you?"

"No, indeed, and if you will only be frank enough with Mrs. Ainsworth, you will find it."

"Then we will say no more. My nerve isn't what it was, and I must avoid dangerously earnest topics in public. Yes, certainly, Mr. Lingard, we will try the leap."

Maud's actress power might be shaken, but it was not gone, for the smile with which she ended her sentence was like sunshine, after the storm in her eyes when it began. The next moment she was engaged in a struggle with her horse, and it was easy to guess that in the end he would leap

the ditch, at the edge of which he was now plunging. Lingard watched her admiringly, while Harcourt, who knew her powers, rode up to Alice's side.

"How are you going home to-night, Mrs. Ainsworth?"

"I have no choice. Robert would not order a carriage, so I must ride. I shall go directly after dinner, for I cannot be away from baby all the evening."

"You look tired. You are not used to such long rides."

"No; the leaping tires me, though I enjoy it at the time. But Cecil is not well, and I have been up with her at night—that is why I am so easily tired to-day."

"Then you will allow me to drive you home?"

"But you are not going early, and I know you meant to ride."

"Only for want of a motive to do anything else. I'll send my horse home, and order my trap. As to going early, it doesn't matter a straw."

"But the Goodwoods won't like it."

"Oh! yes, they will; or, if they don't, it cannot be helped. Please let me do as I like, and say no more about it."

"Very well. Oh, how that horse rears!"

"Yes, but he'll have to give in—there, I told you so. Well ridden, by Jove!"

As he spoke Maud cleared the ditch, and passed them, patting her horse's neck, her face bright with excitement.

"How I envy her!" sighed Alice, "she always seems happy and successful."

"And is one of the most miserable women I know."

"Is that possible? Surely you must be mistaken."

"I wish I were. If ever you have a chance of befriending her, Mrs. Ainsworth, do it. I have known good women who were only good enough to be stern. You are good enough to be also magnanimous."

"I should not like to be less good than you think me," murmured Alice, and for a while they rode on in silence.

While she was questioning herself, and determining that she would fulfil Harcourt's expectations if she had an opportunity of doing so, he was thinking somewhat sadly of his own strange influence over these two women.

His was the true humility that does not deny a gift, but strives to use it well, and he perceived that he was, in some degree, a guardian to each of them. How dear that guardianship was in one case he alone knew. Even Maud had not fathomed the quiet intensity of a feeling that had already

written itself in lines on his face, and had added years to his age.

This was the last of the Goodwoods' riding parties, for in a few days more they set out for the hills. In the early morning hours the doleful noises of the sullen camels began to be heard as they knelt in the compounds* to receive their loads. This lengthy process over, amid cries and chatter of servants and drivers, they would rise and commence their journey, their broad feet making a soft patting sound on the sandy roads.

By-and-by the ladies and children, or a group of sportsmen, set out, some in quaint, green hired carriages, some in dingy litters, others, bound for more distant stations, by rail. Few people who can get away care to remain in the plains after April, and as the leave season for officers begins on the 15th, most of the departures take place about that date. House after house is closed as the inmates start, either for the nearest sanitarium, the gaieties of Simla, or in search of sport. Whatever their destination, they take a pitying farewell of those who are left to endure, literally, the burden and heat of the day.

The Redmaynes had taken a little house in the hill-station of Ampore for their two months' leave. They bade Alice adieu with many secret misgivings, for in truth neither she nor her child looked fit for

* The piece of ground belonging to a house.

encountering the heat, unless cared for more tenderly than was likely to be the case. Alice suspected their doubts, and though she bade them good-bye courageously enough, she was in reality full of dread.

CHAPTER XX.

"There is no compensation for a woman who feels that the chief relation of her life has been no more than a mistake. She has lost her crown."

GEORGE ELIOT.

Now commenced in earnest that terrible season when discomfort increases daily and the heat grows and closes in upon its victims as remorselessly as did the iron chamber of the Inquisition. First, the pith sun-hat becomes absolutely necessary, then hat and parasol together are insufficient protection for the head. Parades and office hours are altered to near day-break; the ghastly punkah begins the monotonous swing which for six months must not pause day or night; the mosquito's angry buzz is heard, and the doors are hermetically sealed till the evening. Happy are those who live where the hot winds will blow through wet grass screens into their houses, or the richer few, who can hire natives in sufficient numbers to work the various machines by means of which the temperature indoors can be lowered.

The Ainsworths did not indulge in more than one thermantidote, so they considered themselves fortunate if the thermometer in their drawing-room did not rise above 98° at midday.

Before this extreme of discomfort was reached, Alice had made a fresh friend. Her husband acceded eagerly to Captain Brabazon's proposal that they should form a whist-party, to meet at alternate houses. To Alice's great satisfaction, little Cecil's existence exempted her from playing the part of hostess, as the gentlemen did not care to risk being disturbed by childish cries. They met, therefore, elsewhere, and from two o'clock till dusk played steadily; nor did it trouble either of the husbands that their wives were left a good deal to themselves by this arrangement.

Military duty was usually over by breakfast-time, and then Captain Ainsworth enjoyed a short siesta, during which his wife carefully kept the baby in the farthest room. About one o'clock he rose and dressed, and adjourned to his rubber. From six to eight, when the rest of the world emerged for exercise, and as much air as could be got, he lounged over to Mess, or occasionally spent part of the afternoon in the racquet-court, coming home to late dinner.

On one of these long solitary afternoons, Alice was roused from a sad day-dream by a servant handing her Mrs. Brabazon's card.

"What a dreadful hour for you to come out!" she exclaimed, as her unexpected guest entered.

"I cannot see in this delicious chill darkness,"

said Maud, pressing her hands on her dazzled eyes. "The glare outside is frightful."

"Come and sit down under the punkah. What made you choose such a time to venture out?"

"Because I wanted to see you alone, and because I do not intend to be present at my husband's whist-parties. You look surprised, but indeed it is true. If I am in the house, he'll send for me to give him a brandy and soda, or on some other pretext of that sort. Will you let me stay with you for a while?"

"Surely," replied Alice, more relieved at this statement than she cared to confess to herself—she knew now how much she had feared this siren. "I shall be glad of your company, for it is very depressing to be shut up in the house all day."

Taking her work, she sat down in a low cane chair, nearly opposite Mrs. Brabazon, so that each benefited by the punkah. For a time their rambling talk touched on topics outside their own circle, but they studiously avoided those nearer home. Maud's dark eyes were studying the face and manner of the woman for whom Cecil Harcourt had pleaded. Alice, her glance bent on her work, felt that there was something more than courtesy in this visit, and reminded herself that, for her guest, Captain Harcourt expected her to do her best.

"Have you read this book?" inquired Mrs. Brabazon, taking a novel off the table.

"Yes, and I envy the woman who wrote it."

"Do you? I met her two or three times, and I do not envy her."

"What was she like? Tell me about her."

"Her chief characteristic, I thought, was weight. Her face was heavy, her dresses were of heavy stuffs and dull colours, her books, I think, are heavy. Her talk was very excellent, but heavy; she sang—heavy; she wrote with a quill pen, and the writing was heavy."

Alice laughed and looked at Maud.

"I envy you, too, your power of description. I can see Miss Clay in my mind's eye."

"If you had had to chatter as much as I, you could describe people too. But what is it in this book that you like so much?"

"I hardly know, but I feel as if Edith must be the writer's self, as if she were struggling to say so much, but shyness or want of sympathy chokes the words."

"You feel that yourself," answered Maud, looking at the earnest face and deepening colour of the speaker.

"I suppose everyone does, more or less," replied Alice, wincing a little at her involuntary self-betrayal.

"Everyone that is not made of ice. Mrs. Ainsworth, tell me honestly, do you hate me?"

Startled at the sudden question, Alice gazed a

moment at the reclining figure opposite to her, and saw a slight quiver on the mouth she thought so scornful. She answered but one word—

"No."

"You did, you know—in Dublin!"

The grey eyes flashed.

"If I did, it was not without cause. It is a pity you allude to bygone unpleasantnesses."

"I respect you for saying that, Mrs. Ainsworth, but I made the allusion that I might do what I never have done for another soul—that I might ask your pardon. I want your friendship too, but I cannot expect to win it."

"Why not?" said Alice slowly.

"Are you generous enough to give it me in spite of—Dublin?"

"Mrs. Brabazon, you spoke of pardon just now. Shall we put bygones out of sight, and begin afresh? I can hardly fancy that my friendship would be worth much to you; I am not clever enough, but I know no other reason why we should not be friends."

"You are a generous woman—more generous than I thought any woman could be. But," she continued, in a lower voice, "Captain Harcourt told me I should find you so."

"Did he? I think you and he have too good an opinion of me, but it is very pleasant."

"Then it will not bore you if I come here of an

afternoon? I suppose, with a wet towel on one's head, one can escape sunstroke. Luckily it is not far."

"Come whenever you like, and make yourself at home."

"Ah, thank you. If you knew how strange that phrase sounds! I have no home, and never shall have one."

Alice's heart echoed the piteous words, but she only said,

"I am sorry for you. Life must be a hard thing, and yet you look so bright and gay."

"Because I was born an actress, I believe. You, in your quiet unsullied life, could not understand the temptations of mine. If you knew all my history, perhaps you would turn away from me even now."

"I hope not. I could not judge you. I think charity is better than judgment."

"There would be fewer sins if more people held that opinion. Some of us seem to be hunted into wrong-doing. I wonder," she continued, leaning forward, with hands tightly clasped on her knee, "could you realise the force of an overwhelming temptation —could you fancy your heart full of distrust, and rebellion, and despair, what would you do?"

"Wait, and I will give you my answer," said Alice, hurrying out of the room. In a moment she

had returned, and ere Maud was aware, had knelt down before her, and laid on her lap a tiny child.

"I can understand the feeling, but this is my safeguard. If you never had such a comforter, I pity you with my whole heart."

"I never had. I see now the difference. Oh, Mrs. Ainsworth, thank heaven for your child!"

Maud's voice broke, and there was silence in the room; then she said softly,

"What is its name?"

"She is christened Alice after me, but she is to be called by her second name, Cecil."

"Cecil!"

"Yes, Captain Harcourt is her godfather."

Again silence, but Maud's hand rested tenderly on the baby's head. It was one of those rare interviews when communication appears to be as much by instinct as by speech. These two women spent many pleasant and friendly hours together, but never again were they as near each other as on that afternoon, when the child's name touched hidden chords in either heart. Neither was certain of the other's feelings, but Alice recognised that in some unexplained way that name was a bond between them, and to Maud's perplexed and anxious soul it was the key-note of the whole scene, and moved her almost to tears. It was she who spoke again.

"That is a good man. You are fortunate in having him for a friend."

"I know it. He is yours too, is he not?"

"Yes. He is the friend of whoever is in trouble and trusts him. There ought to be a beautiful future for him somewhere, if there is any justice in Heaven."

"You do not doubt that, do you?" cried Alice. "And even here there is some honour, I think, for those who deserve it."

"Honour of a sort—yes. The cross for men who do a thing that needs pluck or excitement for instance. Captain Harcourt won his V.C. well, but he deserves something better every day that he lives."

"You know him better than I do, but I can quite believe you are right."

"I know I am. He is the only man I ever met who has seemed to be heroic in the daily life, where there is so much to pay and nothing to gain. But I must be going. You have been a good Samaritan to-day, for you have poured oil and wine into my wounds. I never kiss mere acquaintances, as many women do, but I should like to kiss you."

Alice threw her arms round the other's neck.

"You have done me good too. I think we may help each other, and the little one here may help us both."

Mrs. Brabazon did not go beyond her own compound that evening, but strolled round it, or sat under a broad-leaved pepul-tree near the well, so

that some coolness might be wafted to her from the water pouring into its tiny channels off the creaking Persian wheel. Harcourt, riding alone past the house, saw her, and paused by the low wall to inquire if she were ill that she remained at home.

As she replied she walked across to him, and while she fed the pony with bits of grass she told him of her afternoon's visit.

"That is as it should be, Mrs. Brabazon; I am very glad."

"We spoke of you. I did not know before that the child is named after you. Forgive me for saying it, but Mrs. Ainsworth's ignorance vexes me. I cannot help wishing she knew how good you are."

"I told you what would happen if she guessed anything she had better not know," he answered sharply.

"I know. Do not mistrust me. But I wonder if it is only when we care for what we cannot have, that we care our best."

"I don't know. I cannot dissect things as you do. A fact and a duty are plainly before me, and it matters nothing that under other circumstances both would have been different."

"Women cannot feel so simply. There are wheels within wheels for us."

"More's the pity. Life turns on *is*, not on *if*. We've got to be steady under fire, not argue about the guns."

"Ah!" said Maud, a fresh light on her face,

"'Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why.'"

"Exactly, Mrs. Brabazon. The soldier's creed is a simple one—do your duty, and anyone who is doing that needs no pity. Good night."

"You, at least, need none," thought Maud, as she watched him ride away; "the pity should be kept for that poor girl, who might have lived at that height, and is tied down instead to such a dead level. Who knows?—he might have been less grand then!"

Captain Ainsworth was not altogether pleased when he heard of Mrs. Brabazon's visit. It forced him to conclude that a woman's fancy was, in this case, of a somewhat enduring character. He had no definite wish to compromise either Maud or himself, and he would have been indignant had anyone even accused him of intentionally creating a scandal. But it was certainly no fault of his if people gossiped when he was only enjoying himself in the way that suited him. Of course a man does not talk to a handsome woman as if he were blind to her beauty, and there does exist a rapid language that no listener can overhear, and no man of the world will criticise. Handsome women are usually proficients in it, and Maud was an adept when he met her first, though now she seemed to have forgotten its alphabet. It is one thing to make a com-

munication with the certainty of a quick response, and quite another to look meaningly into eyes that meet yours with blank coldness or haughty astonishment; the position then becomes embarrassing, not to say absurd.

Ainsworth was not a man to expose himself often to treatment of this sort, but at the same time he was too obstinate to withdraw from Mrs. Brabazon's society because she refused to understand his admiration. He dropped the unspoken language, and talked to her instead in a tone of shallow cynicism, to which she replied as courtesy required. In this way he was still amused by her, and to him amusement was the breath of life. He had, in fact, a gambler's craving for excitement, though he never yielded to it, had even lost sight of it at times altogether. This restraint came from no idea of morality, but from an inherited fund of hard sense.

He had enough of his father's shrewdness to see that, in the long run, the gamblers in life lose their stakes, so he was content to lead a staid life, tasting his pleasures cautiously. As Maud, with her sharp generalities and humorous chat, delighted him, so did his wife bore him. Her fancies were too delicate, her thoughts too earnest, for one of his calibre to appreciate.

We all know that nothing so ruffles the temper as to be continually in the presence of those who live at a higher level than ourselves, and Ainsworth

was strongly conscious of this feeling. Alice's devotion to the child that he had never touched, her serene patience under the small miseries of the hot weather, even the marked interest shown in her by others, were all additional provocations. Had she asserted herself more, her home might have been happier; but though her husband would have rated her higher, she would have lost some of her own self-respect. Mrs. Redmayne once jokingly suggested that she should "scold him well," for some obvious neglect, but her answer silenced and grieved her good friend.

"Don't tempt me to do that," she said; "if I spoke at all, I should say what could never be forgotten."

The routine of life in Hazrabagh during the hot weather was as precise out of doors as in. Every day there was croquet for all comers somewhere, from about half-past six till dusk. Once a week the meeting was at one or other of the Messes, while the remaining evenings were filled up by the ladies in turn. There were a few who thought a little variety would be pleasant, and that a quiet ride was a better way of taking exercise than knocking about croquet balls and complaining of the temperature. But even riding must be done deliberately when the air feels as though it came out of an oven, and there is little change of scenery to charm one in the midst of a baked and unbroken plain.

The coming of the English mail was like the finding of an oasis in the desert. Faces on that morning wore an air of animation unknown during the rest of the week, for the letters and papers were sure to supply them with news that would enliven them for a few hours.

Alice longed keenly for her share, and fortunately Walter Percy proved an excellent correspondent.

"Aunt Jane and Ethel are capital friends," he wrote, "indeed, I hope the old lady will never leave the Hall. Her eyesight fails fast, and though she knits as interminably as ever, she cannot write much now. Ethel comes over to read to her, but they always end in talking of you and wishing you were at home."

Not long after Mrs. Brabazon's first visit, Alice received another joyous note from her cousin, announcing his engagement, but adding that it was not to be mentioned to their friends for another year, as Mr. Philips considered his daughter too young to marry.

The —th Hussars were going abroad, therefore Walter had spoken, and his bright spirit already overleapt the months of waiting, and pictured his return. His proud happiness wrung Alice's heart, reawaking the thirst that does in truth "ask a drink divine," and for which mere content is as unsatisfying as the mirage to the panting traveller. With

such thoughts in her mind she went out for her evening stroll, too tired to ride, and far too out of spirits for the exertion of croquet. Unfortunately it was Mrs. Rumbold's "evening," and that energetic lady kept strict note of who came and who stayed away. Mrs. Ainsworth had been absent on more than one occasion, and had been taken to task accordingly. She was therefore forced to make amends on this particular night for her previous delinquencies. She excused herself from playing, in spite of her hostess's remonstrances, and sat down where a hand-punkah kept the warm air in motion. In the next sloping chair was Mrs. Doleman, somewhat out of humour, and inclined to take a gloomy view of matters in general.

"Is it true that your husband never comes to croquet with you, Mrs. Ainsworth?" said she, in her usual slow accents.

"Very seldom; he does not like the game."

"No, they say he prefers whist at Captain Brabazon's—or racquets. Do you know, I'm told all the bachelors in the station go to the Brabazons'. So dreadfully marked, isn't it? But then they think her so very handsome—I hear so, at least."

"So she is," said Alice quietly.

"Do you really think so? I thought she wasn't at all a lady's lady—such *prononcé* style. It's so sad to see how gentlemen prefer that sort of thing.

I haven't spoken to her myself, but I had got that idea of her after seeing her twice."

"I suppose you are not aware that she is a friend of mine?"

"Oh dear me, I'm so sorry! I didn't know—nobody told me, you know, and one has to be so entirely guided by what one hears, of course on good authority. Pray don't mind anything I said, Mrs. Ainsworth."

"Not in the least," replied Alice, with an air Maud herself might have worn.

Mrs. Doleman was not easily silenced, and tried a fresh topic. She never meant mischief, but she always made it; she did not wish to wound, but her arrows always hit some mark.

"Your regiment is quite an acquisition here, Mrs. Ainsworth. I am sure it must be popular."

"My husband's regiment is generally liked, I believe," corrected Alice.

"Yes; it must be a very expensive one, I'm afraid. But there are charming officers in it, and so attentive to ladies. Captain Harcourt now is quite a dear man. As I was saying to Mr. Lingard yesterday, he can't have everything his own way now, for Captain Harcourt is just as nice and obliging."

"I did not know Mr. Lingard had a monopoly of those qualities."

"Dear me now, how cleverly you put things—so amusing, I'm sure. Well, he really had a monopoly,

as you call it, before your regiment came. The last regiment wasn't social. There were so many married officers, and all so devoted to their wives—such an uncommon thing, I'm afraid, they kept among themselves, and never got on with us at all. I don't know how it was, but I assure you everyone in the station would tell you the same thing. So, as I was saying, Mr. Lingard was regularly run after. But your Captain Harcourt is quite as nice, and a handsome man too. He's a great friend of yours, isn't he?"

"We know him very well; he was my husband's best man."

"Best man—ah—exactly. That's what Mr. Lingard said—that you knew him intimately. We were speaking of you—saying that you and he went out a good deal of an evening. It must be a great comfort to have a pleasant escort when your husband doesn't go out—husbands are so dreadfully apt to get into that way; such a shame it is. Is he coming here to-night?"

"He is at the racquet court."

"Dear me! He, too. Well, I hadn't heard that Captain Harcourt ever played."

"I meant my husband. I know nothing about Captain Harcourt."

Alice rose, ostensibly to speak to some one else, but in reality to hide a hot blush, and to end the conversation. It was the first time Harcourt's name

had caused her anything but pleasure, and she felt angry contempt for such unworthy gossip.

Probably Mrs. Doleman had indulged in more of the same sort, for a little later there were some comments at the refreshment-table on the riding parties that interfered with croquet.

"Mrs. Brabazon and Lingard are always out riding together," said Spooner, a young cavalry subaltern, with a pale face and familiar manner.

"And Harcourt's another absentee. By-the-by, where is he to-night?" asked some one.

"Here's Mrs. Ainsworth—ask her—she's sure to know," said the first speaker with a smile. She heard the question, but before she could reply, Harcourt was seen driving up in full uniform.

"Good evening, Captain Harcourt," said Mrs. Rumbold stiffly. "I'm afraid you'll find everyone just leaving, and the ices all melted."

"Yes, I apologise for being so late; but, you see, I have been on duty. I had to go round the guards for Jones, who's down with fever, poor fellow."

"I'm sorry for that."

"So am I. But you'll forgive me, Mrs. Rumbold, and give me the remains of an ice. I'm hotter than any of you, I'm sure."

Offended dignity never had a chance with Harcourt, and Mrs. Rumbold was soon talked into good humour. That duty done, he made his way to Alice, who was still standing near the table.

"May I drive you home, Mrs. Ainsworth? You look tired again to-night."

There was scarcely a perceptible pause ere she accepted the offer, yet she had hesitated, and had determined to alter nothing of her conduct because of idle tongues. Harcourt saw the hesitation—saw, without seeming to notice them, the eyes watching her, and the sneer on the pale face of the man nearest him; then he put down his plate.

"I can't offer to take another lady on the back seat of the dog-cart, but would one of you fellows care to come? Beecham, can you bear to drive instead of riding? There's time for a turn before Mess, if Mrs. Ainsworth likes."

"Delighted," answered the young man. "This is the hottest night I've had, and I know your horse is fast enough to make one fancy there's some air."

"Come away, then."

As they went to the dog-cart, Harcourt could not help asking—"Was I right to give Beecham the offer?"

"Quite right," replied Alice, and by the look on her face—a look he had never seen before—he felt certain that the first pebble had been thrown to disturb the calm he was so sedulous to preserve. Therefore he talked gaily to both his companions, and Alice seconded him so well that, when Spooner asked Beecham that night if he liked playing third to a flirtation, he got an unexpected reply.

"What confounded nonsense you do talk! You're always philandering with some one yourself, so you think everyone else is too. I'd a very jolly drive, and if I get the chance of such another I'll take it."

Nevertheless Spooner kept to his opinion, for a fool often guesses at the tenderest points of better men, not knowing that their weakness includes strength, such as his folly never even dreamed of.

There were one or two of the —th dining with the Ainsworths that night, and they thought their hostess was in wonderful spirits, a rare thing for anyone at that season.

After dinner they sat out in the compound, so as to escape from the vicinity of the heated walls. A faint, very faint air was blowing, and they dispensed with hand-punkahs. A little table with a lamp stood beside them, and with a rough carpet under their feet, and low cane chairs to rest in, they were in comparative comfort. Alice played her part well, but the moment her guests left she sank back wearily.

When Ainsworth had finished his last cheroot in silence, he proposed that they should go in, as it was near midnight.

"Wait a moment, Robert. I want to ask you something," said his wife.

"Well, what is it? I'm short of money this month, so I hope it's no more bills."

"No. Does it matter at all to you what people say about us, or about me?"

"Not particularly. It depends on what it is."

"People remark that you never go about with me. It is the old story, just what happened on board the *Burmah* over again."

"Then I'm not going to alter my ways for that. If that's all, they may just talk."

"They say I go out so often with Captain Harcourt. Robert, you know what a place this is for gossip."

"Why the deuce shouldn't you go out with him, or anyone else you choose?"

"Certainly; if you do not mind remarks."

"Not I. I don't see why a woman shouldn't have some one friend she likes to ride with and talk to. It's no fun being third—I don't care for most of the people one meets, and I really don't see why I should give up any of my amusements to *chaperon* you. What's the use of being a married woman, if you can't go about as you like?"

"As you say, what *is* the use? Robert, Cecil isn't well, you wouldn't let me go home with her, would you?"

"Home! What an extraordinary mood you're in to-night, Alice! How am I to afford that?"

"But suppose you had the money," said she eagerly, "you'd let me go? Is that your only reason? You get on so well without me!"

"No, it isn't my only reason. I thought one's wife was supposed to keep one's house, and all that

sort of thing. I don't see why you should go home. Go and see people, if you're dull, and, in the meantime, do come in."

Alice obeyed without further comment, but she contrasted her husband's carelessness bitterly enough with the watchful kindness that she felt sure had prompted Harcourt's invitation to Mr. Beecham that afternoon.

The difference was tersely expressed on a subsequent occasion, when a note arrived from Lingard, begging Ainsworth to ride with Mrs. Brabazon and him on the following evening. Alice, who was just starting alone for a croquet-party, saw him write an acceptance, and spoke more sharply than usual.

"So you can go directly anyone else asks you, Robert, though you can never ride with me!"

"Oh! well—I don't care about it."

"Perhaps not, but still you go."

"One isn't obliged to do these things for one's relations," retorted her husband, coolly, and went to dress.

Alice knew that Maud had no hand in the note, but that it had been written because she declined to go out so often *tête-à-tête*, and Lingard did not care for many of the younger men who were likely to be disengaged. It was no doubt of her friend that made her eyes flash, and her mouth set itself determinately, as she left the house.

The meeting that evening was at the Mess of a native regiment, and as the band was a fair one, the attendance was usually good. Mrs. Ainsworth was much admired there, and a group of acquaintances gathered round her before the games were arranged.

She chose a moment when several people were within hearing to make a remark that was sure to be noticed.

"Captain Harcourt, have you anything to do to-night?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Ainsworth."

"Then will you take me for a drive, and come and dine with us? You have not dined in our house for an age!"

"With pleasure. We might have time to drive as far as that old tomb you wanted to see."

"Yes. Dinner can always wait, if we are late for it. I shall only play one match."

Major Bellaire was one of the group that overheard Alice's invitation. He never touched a croquet mallet himself, but used to lounge about, commenting on the play in a manner that he knew to be little short of exasperating to those who made it a serious affair. He watched Mrs. Ainsworth play out a hasty game, saw Harcourt assist her carefully into the dog-cart, and when they had driven off, he strolled across to the chairs, and dropped into one beside Maud Brabazon, who was leisurely eating an ice.

"Our friend Mrs. Ainsworth seems to be taking kindly to Indian customs," said he in his most cynical tone.

A very quick observer might have detected the slightest possible stiffening of Maud's graceful neck, an indication that she was on her guard, yet she did not move in her chair, and answered listlessly,

"Does she? I should have thought she was English to the backbone."

"The custom I allude to is not wholly unknown in England."

"It's too hot for the exertion of guessing riddles, Major Bellaire."

"This is hardly a puzzle though. Mrs. Ainsworth evidently prefers one escort to any other in the station."

"Oh," said Maud, shifting her position so as to look Bellaire in the face, and speaking as though she were inviting gossip, "you think there's a little flirtation going on between her and Captain Harcourt?"

"It looks tolerably like it, I think. The symptoms in these cases are always much the same."

"You think so? You never see much difference, then, and this case is just such another as Mrs. Pippett and Mr. Spooner?" she replied, naming too well-known inseparables.

"If it isn't as decided yet, it will be before the hot weather's over."

"You don't believe in simple friendship?"

"My dear Mrs. Brabazon, I wasn't born yesterday!" was the contemptuous answer.

"You're a clever man, Major Bellaire, and you know a great deal of our sex," said Maud; but her tone changed slightly, and the gentleman, though he bowed at the compliment, looked a little puzzled. "But you make one mistake, and, knowing you as I do, I scarcely wonder at it."

"And that is——"

"You don't know when to believe; and a man who believes too little, blunders as completely as the man who believes too much."

"Perhaps Mrs. Brabazon will undertake to teach me credulity," said Bellaire, trying to hide some annoyance under a sneer.

"I!" said Maud rising, with a curl on her lip. "I couldn't teach you, after hearing your remarks on Mrs. Ainsworth. I don't know how to teach the alphabet to the blind;" and she walked away, feeling that for the moment she had revenged her friend.

Harcourt, meantime, perceived that something had occurred to excite his gentle companion. With rare tact he sought for no confidences, but talked on indifferent subjects during their drive, or sat silent, as appeared to suit her best. He judged wisely, for in the mood that was on her when they first set out, a hint from him would have opened the floodgates, and words might have been uttered

that both would have regretted. As it was, silences became more frequent as they proceeded, and Harcourt at last ventured to bid her lean back and rest. "You are not obliged to make company-conversation for me, you know."

"No; and it is such a relief to be silent. When Mr. Lingard has driven me, I did not half enjoy it, because I was obliged to talk perpetually."

"And yet you need not, if you only knew him a little better. He's a good fellow, and would really wish you to get as much benefit as possible from your drive. You never thought of keeping a trap of your own?"

"Captain Ainsworth will not do it. He thinks we spend enough on our horses. You see, he likes to have a pony besides for himself."

She had never spoken so formally of her husband before, and Harcourt was warned by her voice.

"You are not resting now. I positively won't speak for the next two miles."

"Very well. I really will be quiet. I am always so weary now. I suppose it's the heat."

Such quiet did Alice good, and her face had lost its hard expression when she reached her own door. Harcourt's presence gave her a feeling of restfulness more beneficial than air or exercise. It was moral, not physical calm she required, and she knew, although she did not reason about it, that she found it near him; therefore she had invited

him to dinner, thinking to get through the evening more peacefully if he was there. Ainsworth, she knew, was always ready for a guest, and she hoped to recover by the morrow the hard equanimity that his cutting words had disturbed.

The heat now approached its climax. May was past, and had consumed, as the days dragged on, much of the health and energy that the cold weather had fostered. The rains in Hazrabagh were late and slight, and the motionless air of June was like a furnace. The foliage grew daily drier in the sick yellow glare, the surface of the parched plain cracked and crumbled into hot dust, and English faces grew paler and more weary. Twice or thrice the parting shots were fired over the grave of some careless soldier, struck down by sun-stroke or fever, and rang dismally on the ears of those who endeavoured to keep up a semblance of cheerfulness at the rendezvous of the evening. It was whispered that Captain Brabazon's play was no longer what it had been, and one doctor offered to bet that he would not last out the hot season, unless he changed his mode of life. People glanced curiously at Mrs. Brabazon, and wondered if she knew, and what she thought—nay, what she would do if——There was no need for anyone to fill up the pause. And Maud carried herself as royally as ever, though she knew the speculations her friends indulged in, and could almost have read the very words on their lips.

Those weeks seemed to burn themselves in on her brain, and she never recalled them without a shudder. With all the power of her strong will, she strove to banish from her mind the least thought of freedom, and when instinct threatened to conquer, she would plunge into any occupation at hand—read a novel, hurry over to Mrs. Ainsworth, seize on the merest trifle that might divert the current of her thoughts. She tried her utmost to induce her husband to alter his habits—tried often and conscientiously, though she met, as she expected, with a contemptuous rebuff. It was a trial that shook her being to its centre, and filled her with a terror hitherto unknown to her—a terror of herself, of the impulses that were roused in her for the first time.

It is terrible to find oneself face to face, as it were, with a strong, uncontrolled spirit, that looks one in the eyes and says boldly, "I am part of you—your self that you never saw till now, when this or that temptation assails you. You do not know my strength, but all your weakness is known to me." Let him or her to whom there comes this unbidden guest seek safety in flight from the temptation that evoked him out of his dim hiding-place; but when, as in Maud's case, such escape is impossible, woe be unto those who do not combat him upon their knees!

CHAPTER XXI.

"Oh, life as futile, then, as frail!
Oh, for a voice to soothe and bless!
What hope of answer or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil."

In Memoriam.

As yet, Captain Brabazon had not so betrayed himself in public as to cause either official rebuke or semi-official advice to be administered. The whist parties too were continued, because though the other players grumbled, neither liked to be the one to speak to the delinquent. Ainsworth, who had lost a good deal of money, was at last requested by the others to intimate to Captain Brabazon that his head was frequently not clear enough for play, and he undertook the task, though most unwillingly. Beecham was with him while the subject was under discussion, and the two strolled homewards, talking it over till they reached the Ainsworths' door.

"Come in and have a glass of sherry; it wants a few minutes still to dinner-time."

"But will Mrs. Ainsworth like it, as it is so late? Is she in?"

"It doesn't matter a d—n whether she's in or not. Come along."

They entered the verandah, and from behind one of the broad pillars Alice advanced quietly to meet them. Beecham's start was perceptible, but her manner was so easy that he thought she could not possibly have overheard, and drank his sherry without disturbing himself further. He told the story at Mess, however, and Ainsworth would perhaps have been surprised had he heard the comments freely passed upon him. Whether it did not occur to him to regret his hasty speech, or whether he was too proud or too careless to allude to it, his wife could not tell. That he knew she had heard it she was almost certain, but not a word was said by either, though the unhappy phrase seemed to ring again and again in her ears. Her presence of mind at the moment of its utterance showed clearly that she had learnt a reticence foreign to her character, and that she cared comparatively little for anything her husband might say or do. He had strained the chords of love too far, and no touch of his could awake any music from them again.

There was soon no room left in Alice's mind for words of his to rankle, for Cecil's baby frame began to give way in the continued heat. That pitiful sound, the crying of a child in pain, was heard in the house, and the doctor looked grave when he was called in. Her ignorance saved the mother from anxiety at first, but when Doctor Butler

began to visit her twice a day, she grew half frantic with fear. Once and again she had to sit down under the punkah, panting with pain and palpitation, and the scared expression of her eyes went to the good doctor's heart.

Mrs. Brabazon came daily to help her, other friends called to condole and advise, but while she was grateful to them all; they appeared to her to move in a different universe, apart from her world, the world that contained only herself and her child. She saw Harcourt sometimes for a few minutes, and to him alone did it seem possible to approach the one subject of her thoughts with any freedom.

At last there came a morning when the doctor bade her arrange to go as speedily as possible to the hills, and the words gave her fresh hope. Surely in the pure cool air the wasted frame would recover its roundness, the pale cheeks regain their delicate rose. She would have started on the instant, had it been practicable, and when her husband returned from parade, he found her in a state of feverish excitement.

She no longer consulted him, or asked his permission, but vehemently bade him carry out her plans. Surprised, and more annoyed than grieved, he began to speak of the expense, but the words had hardly passed his lips ere his wife threw open her desk, and hastily broke the seal of a packet she took out of the secret drawer.

"I have money, Robert, I don't know how much, but you can see for yourself."

"The devil you have! Have you been hoarding up a private purse of your own?"

Alice made no reply, nor did she shrink when her husband burst into a storm of rage, on seeing further evidence of his father's rooted mistrust. The envelope contained a cheque for three hundred pounds, for Alice's sole use, and a note to the effect that, if Ainsworth interfered with her spending of it, the amount would be stopped out of his yearly allowance.

When his anger had exhausted itself, his wife, passing over the outbreak as though his words had fallen on deaf ears, returned to her point.

"Will you go to the telegraph office at once, and wire to the Redmaynes about a house, or shall I send a servant?"

"I'll go," said he sulkily, quelled by her utter indifference.

Ere night it had been arranged that Mrs. Ainsworth was to take the small house at Ampore that the Redmaynes were on the eve of quitting, in order to return to the plains. It was impossible for the sick child to travel by day, besides that few passenger trains ran while the sun was high; Alice therefore was forced to wait till six o'clock on the following evening, when she prepared for her journey.

Her husband was by this time thoroughly provoked, and, judging from his point of view, not entirely without cause. His resentment at his father's letter had by no means cooled, the stir of preparation in the house had disturbed his morning's rest, and the rooms had been rendered intolerably hot by the opening of the doors when the luggage was carried out.

Alice had spoken but little to him during the day, but at the last moment she asked him to cut her some sandwiches. He sat down to do so, when the baby began to cry shrilly in the adjoining room at the unwelcome process of dressing.

"Do it yourself," he exclaimed impatiently, flinging down his knife and fork. "I'm going further off, for I cannot stand that infernal row,—it makes me positively ill!"

This was not purely a figure of speech, for what nerves Ainsworth possessed seemed to be tried beyond endurance by this particular sound, yet at such a moment the words stung, and when the parting came it was only by an effort that Alice compelled herself to bid him good-bye with a semblance of cordiality.

A sleepless night in the dusty railway carriage, and four hours' posting in a rattling vehicle over still dustier roads, had almost worn out the travellers ere they reached the base of the hills. There litters, known as doolies, had been provided by the Red-

maynes, and as they began to ascend, and felt the air growing cooler at every step, Alice breathed more freely than she had done since the hot weather commenced. Leaning on her elbow as she lay in the doolie, she watched the weary child, and when she saw the restless movements cease, the clenched hands unclose, and the puckered face relax in sleep, she dropped her own head on the pillow and shed such tears as her anxiety had never drawn from her.

Mrs. Redmayne, who had purposely postponed her departure for some hours, met her with open-armed affection, and smoothed her way by making arrangements for supplies, and telling her what doctor to consult. After she had left, the inevitable reaction came on, and Alice sank into a state of lassitude that would have alarmed her if she had had energy enough to think about it. The pure breezes, however, and the complete rest, soon restored her, and the beauty of the scenery tempted her out of the house.

Though pale and feeble still, Cecil was apparently recovering, and when Alice was not occupied with her she began to take more and more extended rambles. Ampore was a pretty little station, but to new-comers from the plains it was a perfect paradise. The long slopes of grass, the sharp red rocks, the whispering forests of deodar, and beyond these the everlasting snows, were sights that

touched Alice deeply. There were times, as she sat on the grass, that she could have fancied herself obtaining a glimpse into heaven, but for a lingering uneasiness respecting the child in her lap. Yet she led a lonely life, for she called nowhere, and not a soul, save the doctor, whose wife was in England, ever came near her.

In her first misery she had begged Mrs. Redmayne not to mention her name to anyone, and, somewhat unwisely, her friend had complied with her request. She could not summon courage to make fresh acquaintances; when she saw other ladies on the Mall, in their brightly-coloured litters and fresh costumes, she felt as if her mind and her dress were alike unfit for their society. She had thought of nothing but necessaries in her troubled packing, and had not even brought books for herself, much less toilettes for visiting. Her very sitting-room was bare and dull. A round table, the wood stained a dingy red, occupied the centre of the room; at one end was a clumsy sideboard of the same colour; near the door a stiff cane sofa only half hid a broken patch in the whitewashed walls, and three chairs and a smaller table completed the furniture. As long as the weather was fine, Alice was indifferent to the condition of her house, for she was drinking in deep draughts of healthful delight from the hills, and did not miss her usual occupations.

Her husband wrote to her now and again, brief

notes that were not unkind, unless from the absence of definite kindness. In one of them he remarked, as though anxious to escape wearisome questioning, "Harcourt asks after you so often that I wish you'd write and tell him about the child yourself."

Alice acted on the suggestion with a certain gladness, and filled a sheet of paper with ease, though her other letters were short and laboured. Even to Mrs. Redmayne she could not bring herself to give full details of the little patient's health, since the report was at best but a very poor one; but to Harcourt she could not only write the truth, but, much to her own surprise, could add descriptions of the scenery that so charmed her. It seemed quite natural to tell him whatever was uppermost in her mind, and she yielded to the impulse without self-questioning or hesitation, and wrote as she had never before written to anyone. While life was thus pausing with her between hope and despair, Maud Brabazon's troubles were drawing to a close.

It was on the night of a fearful dust-storm that the end came.

The day had been frightfully sultry, the sky on the horizon was black and thunderous, and there had been a few of the short, sharp puffs of wind that are the forerunners of a tropical tempest. The doors had scarcely been opened for the evening before the servants hurried in to shut them again,

exclaiming in their fervid language that "the sky was about to speak."

Hardly had the last bolt been fastened, ere the sudden gloom of the storm swept down upon them. It was impossible to see a yard beyond the windows, so densely was the lurid air filled with yellow sand; the wind hissed in fierce gusts, tearing thatch off the roof, and hurling down boxes and tents stored in the verandah. Drowning the din of falling wood and rattling doors, came loud angry peals of thunder, and the lightning shot redly through the whirling sand.

It was a terrific sight, and Maud saw that her husband was completely unnerved. She knew it was out of the question to get their dinner carried across the strip of gravel that separated them from the kitchen until the storm had abated, and for a moment she felt afraid of being alone with this trembling and miserable man. To her great relief, she found that one of the servants had remained in the house; calling him from the corner where he was crouching, she made him assist her to get out some wine and bread and butter, the only available food, in the hope of inducing her husband to rouse himself. At her suggestion he came to the dining-room, and swallowed a glass of wine, but would not touch the bread, and, indeed, in a few minutes it was too gritty with the all-penetrating sand to be palatable.

Presently he looked askance at his wife, and

shuffled across the room to the cupboard where the brandy was kept. Quick as thought, Maud intercepted him, and seizing the bottle, faced him, a denial on her lips.

Before she could speak, he struck her on the breast, and then stood hesitating, scowling at her sullenly with bloodshot eyes.

Fortunately, the servant had left the room. By a superhuman effort, Maud controlled herself, and while the poor wretch quailed before her indignant face, she deliberately poured the contents of the bottle on the ground, and then dropped it, so that it should appear to have been upset by accident. There was a terrible silence, broken only by the crash of a falling tree, then her husband laughed—a hideous, evil laugh—and turning from her, shuffled away to his own dressing-room, the door of which he bolted.

His wife sank into a chair, shivering from head to foot, and there she sat for more than an hour, till the tempest had passed on its destroying path, and the servants came in with lights and food.

In answer to a summons, Captain Brabazon took his place at table, but after he had tasted the soup, he got up, and said he was tired, and was going to lie down in his room, adding, with an oath, that his wife had better beware how she disturbed him.

All that evening Maud hardly moved, but sat expecting she knew not what, nervously alive to every

sound, and realising for the first time the torture of physical fear.

When at last she went to bed she could not sleep, and towards three in the morning she rose, determined to brave her husband's anger, and ascertain what he was doing. The storm had wept itself away in rain, and the punkah-coolies met her as she emerged from her room, and asked if they might leave off work for the rest of the night, as the air was cool. She gave the required permission, and as she stood in the verandah, watching the dark figures slink away in the dim light, she drew in long breaths of cool fragrance from the garden, and even stretched out her hands to feel the welcome drops that dripped from the thatch. Then, with reviving courage, she crossed the sitting-rooms to the other side of the house, where, by a different verandah, she could reach the outer door of her husband's room. Here the solitary coolie was still plying his rope, shivering at his task in the freshened atmosphere. He looked up startled, but Maud passed him without speaking, and pushing open the door, entered the chamber.

The stifling air struck hotly on her face, for the servants had not dared to come here when they threw open the rest of the house. A single candle was almost burnt out under its glass shade near the bed, and its light looked sicklier in the coming dawn.

A towel, pinned on to lengthen the punkah,

flapped whitely to and fro, but it did not hide from Maud the dead face on the bed, nor did it need a second glance to show her a bottle and a broken glass upon the floor.

Thus, in the dim moist dawn, Maud Brabazon stood alone by the corpse of the man who had done so much to ruin her life, and she thanked God that she had been able to refrain from a hasty word in that last hour that they were together.

She had presence of mind enough to gather up the fragments of glass, and the half-empty bottle, and while the terrified coolie ran to call the servants, she threw them far into the tangled bushes.

"Heat apoplexy," was the verdict of the doctors, and when she heard it she felt that she had done what she could to preserve her husband's memory from discredit.

In such cases all is over with hideous speed in India, and the same evening saw the solemn pageant of a soldier's funeral winding across the plain, now glittering with fresh pools of water.

The widow watched it from her window in tearless silence, — listened to the great beats of the muffled drum, pulsing through the strains of the Dead March,—listened till the parting volleys rang sharply on the air, and then she put her hands to her head with a sudden cry.

Mrs. Redmayne, who was with her, sprang forward and helped her to a chair.

"I am ill," she said hurriedly, "perhaps I may be delirious, my head has been so bad of late. Don't let many people come about me, don't let them hear me chatter,—I may talk, you know, about him, perhaps,—don't mind me, it will be all nonsense, all nonsense!"

Mrs. Redmayne sent off a messenger, who met the doctor returning from the funeral, and brought him with all speed to the house, but before night Maud was down with brain-fever, and Mrs. Redmayne had installed herself as nurse, and absolutely refused to admit any but native attendants. The attack was sharp but short, and the patient's steady controlled temperament greatly aided her recovery. Once only did she betray any undue excitement, when questioning Mrs. Redmayne anxiously as to her behaviour during her delirium.

"You have said nothing to diminish my regard for you, my dear," said the kind soul. "I have heard enough from Alice Ainsworth to make me change my former opinion of you, and I have been careful to admit no one but the ayahs when you were mentioning names, or were at all coherent in your ravings."

The sick woman feebly drew down the homely face that was bending above her, and whispered her gratitude, and a few minutes later fell into the deep sleep of returning health.

Her illness, and the shock that preceded it, had

awakened much sympathy in the station, and, as often happens, the ladies who had been loudest in their animadversions, were foremost in their offers of help.

Perhaps it was an uneasy conscience that prompted Mrs. Doleman to make some of the delicate jellies for which she was famous, and send them over to Mrs. Brabazon, and a little self-reproach may have mingled with the ingredients of Mrs. Rumbold's "Friar's Chicken." In that land of paradoxes, bitter slander and brotherly kindness tread hard on each other's heels.

No desire to atone for past harshness worked in Lingard's mind, but the choicest of the many bouquets sent to the invalid came from his garden; and hearing by chance that she had expressed a wish for fruit, he it was who spent wonderful sums in procuring it from a distance.

He, too, roused Mrs. Goodwood's interest, so that she offered to receive Maud at her pretty home in the hills as soon as she was able to move.

A soldier's wife was engaged to take care of her on the journey, and she left Hazrabagh with her heart full of thankfulness and wonder at the kindnesses showered upon her.

She was nearing her desired haven at last, and as she lay on the sofa in the bright drawing-room, where Mrs. Goodwood's genial spirit made a guest thoroughly at home, she felt that she had risen from

her sick-bed a changed woman, entering on a new life.

It fell to Captain Ainsworth to be President of the Committee assembled, according to Indian custom, to arrange Captain Brabazon's affairs, and he showed in this delicate and troublesome task more tact and good taste than most people would have expected.

Mrs. Redmayne, whose husband was one of the members of the committee, spoke of his behaviour with surprise to Harcourt, but he did not share her astonishment.

"He is the most singular fellow I ever met," said he, "for there are occasional flashes of a better nature in him that completely puzzle one. I was with him when we heard of Brabazon's death, and he turned as white as a sheet. I believe it requires something sensational to pierce the outer shell of the man, and then one gets at what is unexpectedly good."

"It is a pity his goodness lies so very deep," remarked the lady drily.

"So it is. But, my dear Mrs. Redmayne, if one didn't believe in its existence somewhere or other, how on earth could one tolerate his brutal selfishness?"

"I often wonder how you do tolerate it; I don't."

"Ah," said the other sadly, "there's another reason for being merciful. One might alter the

parable a little; if one can't help seeing that there's a beam of selfishness in his eye, one may be sure that some equally great beam darkens one's own. Upon my word, I think it is only an utter fool who can be really uncharitable."

"You are right; but I think myself there's a time in most lives when the epithet of fool is tolerably well deserved for some reason or other."

"You are severer than I, Mrs. Redmayne, though in my own case I sometimes think it's the exception when I'm not one."

Harcourt moved away with a sigh as he ended his sentence, and Mrs. Redmayne, meditating over the insight she had obtained of late into many lives, wished that more men were capable of following in his footsteps. Little by little she had guessed at his story, and Maud's wild talk had confirmed her ideas. She began to understand the love and admiration her husband felt for him—a love so strong that she had at one time regarded it as the only weakness in which her Dick indulged.

July was now at hand, and Harcourt intended taking a fortnight's leave to the hills; but his wonted decision forsook him when he debated where he was to go. The Goodwoods would make him welcome at Kotpore, but, with all his friendliness for Mrs. Brabazon, he did not wish to stay in the same house with her. He knew, too, that if he denied himself the one thing for which he longed, he must spend

his leave in solitary sport, for he would not be inclined for society. Had Alice been no more to him than any other friend, he would in all probability have gone unhesitatingly to Ampore, as it was the nearest hill station, and would have visited her there as a matter of course. As it was, he dared not do so without at least assuring himself that no trouble would ensue for her through any objection on her husband's part. He knew that he was incapable of judging the question from another's point of view; self-consciousness was too strong, and he could not strike the balance between inclination and discretion.

At last he broached the subject, with as much indifference as he could assume, while walking home from Mess with Ainsworth.

"It's so hard to know where to go on a fortnight's leave. I thought of trying Ampore."

"Well, I've no doubt Alice will be delighted to see you. You and she always get on; and you don't seem to mind your namesake squalling."

"It isn't musical; but the poor little thing can't help it."

"I call it perfectly infernal. So would you if you heard it as often as I did. Alice doesn't care; but I suppose women like that sort of thing."

"You advise me to go there, then?"

"I can't advise, for I know no more about the place than you do. You should ask Redmayne about it. You haven't time for Simla; and I dare-

say Ampore's no worse than any other Indian hill-place. If you do go, you can try to keep Alice from sitting with the baby all day long."

"Certainly I will. One doesn't get people like her to talk to every day."

"What the deuce you talk about puzzles me. However, I never had a gift that way. If you are going, let me know in time; Mrs. Redmayne wants to send some parcel of clothes, and you might take it up."

"I think I'll say at once that I will go. I dare-say I shall find some one I know among the dépôt fellows."

Harcourt walked long up and down his garden that night, vainly trying to comprehend his friend's state of mind. It was clear that Ainsworth did not in the least object to his going to Ampore, though he must have been aware of the lonely life Alice was leading, and the probable comments if she were seen to go about much with a stranger. Was he wilfully blind, or utterly careless of the world's opinion? Was he, Cecil, imagining risks that did not exist?

It was impossible to say. In all probability Ainsworth considered himself so secure of his wife's devoted affection that he never for a moment supposed that any coolness on his own part could diminish it. Gossip did not harm him, and he did not care to shield her from it. Harcourt believed in her honour

as firmly as her husband believed in her love; it was for his own resolution he feared, so terribly had he suffered in her absence.

As long as he could see her, could know from day to day how she fared, he was absolutely certain of his self-command, but his armour was not proof against the trial of absence, and the knowledge that she was enduring pain he could not avert. He was discovering unexpected weakness where he thought himself most strong, now that circumstances laid bare the vulnerable point.

He forced himself to make his preparations with no appearance of hurry, and almost overdid his precaution, for Major Martyn, who shared his house, jokingly remarked that he need not have taken leave, if he cared so little to get away.

Once out of Hazrabagh, he lost not a moment on the road, and reached Ampore late at night. Next morning, having introduced himself to some of the dépôt, he made inquiries for Mrs. Ainsworth's house, adding that he had a parcel to deliver to her immediately. Her bungalow was a lonely one, at the extreme end of the station, and as he hastened with a throbbing heart up the steep path that led to it, he had to summon all his energies to enable him to meet her calmly. He succeeded, as courage does succeed, when a good cause demands self-mastery, and sitting as he did, carefully, with his

back to the light, Alice read nothing in his face but the signs of fatigue consequent on the hot weather.

That first interview safely over, he fell at once into his usual ways. The perfectly frank greeting Alice accorded him restored his self-possession, for it allowed of no misinterpretation. It cleared away the mists of morbid doubt that had troubled him, and brought again distinctly before him the imperative necessity for watchfulness, lest he should mar her child-like confidence.

He easily learnt how monotonous her existence had been, and remarked immediately the bare ugliness of her room. Two days after his arrival, his servant brought sundry parcels to Mrs. Ainsworth, with a note which ran as follows:—

"Wednesday Morning.

"DEAR MRS. AINSWORTH,

"I am collecting a lot of Indian things to send home, and this is a good place for picking them up. They won't go till the cold weather, and if you will use some of them in the meantime, you will be doing me a favour. I will ask you to carry them back to Hazrabagh for me. Please keep the little work-box for yourself.

"Yours sincerely,

"C. H."

Alice could not but suspect that some, at least,

of the purchases had been made with a view to their immediate destination, but she was content to accept her friend's courtesy without much question. She thoroughly appreciated the difference in the appearance of her room, when she had arranged the pretty table-cover and tasteful boxes, palm leaf fans, and elaborately tinted cups of *papier-maché*. She knew enough of their value to be able to use them without too great a sense of obligation, the only costly thing sent her being the workbox of sandal-wood and ivory.

The rains had partially begun, so that she was forced to remain a good deal indoors, and Harcourt was more than rewarded for his fraud when she told him he had made her room look home-like.

Sometimes, during one of those rare and exquisite gleams when the sun forces its way through the heavy-folded rain-clouds, they would go for a walk together, and he thought that on these occasions she recovered the readiness of her girlish enthusiasm, though it was deeper-toned than of old. He responded to her fancies, and drank in her dreams with such devotion as might have been given to a saint; and when the strain became more than he could bear, would check her by kindly mockery of her Quixotism and romance.

One afternoon impressed itself deeply on his memory—the last, though they did not know it at time, of this pleasant communion. Harcourt

had spread a cloak on a rock, so that they could sit where the boughs of a giant deodar framed in the view of the valley below them. Rounded hills, brown cottages nestling among the crops, long terraced fields, where the vivid green of the rice mingled with the yellow and crimson tufts of the sariara, lay stretched far out to the west; while above their heads the low breeze sighed in the broad branches, and the beetles chirped drowsily among the smaller trees.

Black banks of cloud were rolling slowly up from the northward, and beginning to cast deep shadows on the nearer hills, but as yet the sun kept the mastery over the rest of the sky, and softened the brilliant colouring with a veil of haze.

The spectators had been gazing for some time in silence at the landscape, and Alice's thoughts had wandered to Maud Brabazon, and her strange life.

"Maud writes very happily from the Goodwoods," said she, "they have been very kind to her."

"Yes, and it must be a wonderful relief to her to be with such people, after the dreadful life she must have led with poor Brabazon."

"It must, indeed. You were right when you said she was a miserable woman."

"Her life has been a series of dramas," replied Harcourt, "verging on tragedy more than once. I heard one chapter of it by accident, not long before

we left Dublin. I wasn't sworn to secresy; shall I tell it you?"

"Yes, I should like to hear it; she always speaks so sadly of her young days, as if some recollection haunted her."

"She had a cousin, about her own age, who was greatly devoted to her. She was certainly fond of him in a way, but they neither of them had a sixpence, and when he asked her to wait till he had made some money, she refused. She said, truly enough, that her father, who was a scoundrel, I believe, would expect her to marry well, and that she could not endure years of persecution for any man's sake. There's no doubt she could say hard things sometimes, and the lad went off to sea without bidding her good-bye. He had friends who were willing to help him in the merchant service, and when he saw an opening in it, he came back to Maud, believing that she really cared for him. He found her just married, and then he lost himself altogether. He had to leave his ship, and ended by becoming a common sailor in the navy, and was killed in a brush between a gunboat and some Chinese pirates. A lieutenant on board had recognised him, and told me his death was positive suicide. He left a letter for his cousin, written just before the action, and I believe she thinks she killed him."

"Poor thing! How very dreadful for her! How can she ever forget it?"

"Of course that's the natural way for her and you to look at it. I confess I think differently. The man must have been a weak sort of fellow to have gone wrong as he did, even if his cousin did flirt a little with him. Any way, I can't pity him, because of that letter."

"You would have had him 'die and make no sign.'"

"I would have had him live, Mrs. Ainsworth," he said very gravely, "till he had leave to lay down his arms; but if the poor wretch hadn't courage for that, he might have been faithful to his old love, and remained silent. Real love wouldn't have tried to stab a woman as he must have done by writing a farewell."

"No; but there's so little real love that one scarcely expects such heroism as you mean. That would have been carrying out the old motto, 'Trustie to the end.'"

"You admire that motto?" said Harcourt, looking at her earnestly.

"It was my greatest favourite when I made mottoes a study. It seems to me to be a sort of everyday rendering of 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.' If that poor lad had acted up to it, one would have felt that the crown was deserved. As it was, what can have been the use of such a miserable failure?"

She was gazing dreamily at the sinking sun as

she spoke, and her companion shaded his face with his hand lest she should turn round suddenly.

"You are asking the bitterest question that a man can ask himself. Can you answer it? What is the use of any life that fails in attaining its end? Of course, religionists answer one easily; but there are times when one doubts everything, except the reality of the failure."

Alice was silent, and he continued, passionately—

"Look at Mrs. Brabazon. I believe she had the making of a fine, noble woman in her. What is the use of all the pain she has caused and borne? If it were oneself alone that suffered, it would matter less; but to know that one's own success would have been gain to others as well—I mean, you know, if that boy had lived, and they had loved each other," he added hastily.

Still Alice paused; but her eyes dilated and filled with tears. At last she spoke, tremulously at first, but her voice growing firmer as she went on—

"I am not skilful enough to argue—I can only give you a woman's answer. Neither you nor I can tell what may come of Maud's life, or of the lives she has influenced. We do not even know what has happened to that one soul that we think was so ruined. I do not believe that anything good is wasted. Faithfulness must be rewarded somewhere, just as surely as that sun remains, though the clouds are overshadowing it. And if things do seem strange

and hard, isn't there a sort of reward in knowing one has done right? When even that fails, one can only say that the gold must not complain of the fire."

Here were Harcourt's own ideas confronting him, so curiously did these two think alike. It flashed across him that he had spoken to Maud of the reward of conscience, and now that he was himself in the grip of mental trouble, he wondered if he had underrated her struggles.

"Thank you, Mrs. Ainsworth," said he in a low voice, "your answer is sufficient for me at least, and I will not forget your words. Now let us go back, for the rain is coming, and you may get chilled in this fresh wind."

The threatening storm was not unwelcome, for they were both glad of the excuse to hurry homewards without further conversation.

It is hard to descend abruptly to common levels after scaling some sunlit peak, and one is apt to feel a momentary shyness with one's dearest friend when chance has given each a sudden glimpse into the other's bare heart. Alice, it is true, saw but half a truth; she perceived that Harcourt was alluding to his own history, but she guessed no more than this.

That night the rains came on in grim earnest, and she found that in leaving the plains she had but exchanged one form of discomfort for another. Though less exhausting than the heat, the rainy season in

the hills is extremely trying. The clouds hang so heavily that it is not uncommon to see them rolling along the mountain below the houses; thick white fog penetrates into every cranny, mould breaks out in blue blotches on boots, on books, on trunks; lucifer matches will not strike, the paper in an open blotting-book grows clammy, and even with a wood-fire burning the air is miserably damp. For baby Cecil the change was very severe, and in two days she was again dangerously ill.

From the moment that the old symptoms showed themselves, the mother's mind seemed incapable of any distinct ideas; thought became an inarticulate cry. Day and night, through all her tending, when she sat down and forced herself to eat, or when she gave Harcourt her report, an incessant prayer was in her heart. She wrote to her husband, but somewhat curtly, for it gave her positive pain to see her fears expressed in black and white before her. His reply came just after breakfast, when Harcourt called as usual to inquire how the night had passed. They were standing near the fire when she opened the letter, and the moment she had glanced at it she thrust it, by an uncontrollable impulse, into his hand.

"Oh, it is too cruel; I cannot bear it!" she cried.

Harcourt read rapidly,

"Hazrabagh, July ——.

"DEAR ALICE,

"I quite expected your account of the child from what the doctor said before you left. I fancy she was always rather a weed. Get help and don't overwork yourself. No news, and infernally hot here.

"Yours affectionately,

"R. A."

"He is a——" began Harcourt, savagely, but Alice stopped him, catching his arm in her earnestness.

"He is my husband and your friend. I was wrong to give you that. Say nothing, but go."

He left her without a word, and as he closed the door she staggered to a chair, and fell back half fainting. She dared not call the ayah lest she should break Cecil's restless slumbers, so she remained silent, the sharp pain making every breath difficult. There the doctor found her, and with hasty remedies gave her some relief, but his voice was very compassionate as he inquired if she suffered often in this way. She smiled as she answered the question, and the smile had grown more confident when their short conversation was ended. It was on her lips still when he shook his head sadly as he felt Cecil's tiny pulse, it was there still when a message came in the evening that Captain Harcourt had called to inquire for the

child, but was waiting in the verandah. Alice went to the door and held out her hand.

"Forgive me for speaking so sharply this morning. I was altogether wrong. Try to forget everything. The doctor thinks very ill of baby to-day, and she is awake, so I cannot stay, but I wanted to say that to you to-night."

"You surely need not ask forgiveness from me for anything," replied he, wondering within himself at that unearthly smile, but she only said "good night," and he went away, more anxious than he had been yet.

The long hours of darkness that followed brought no rest to the poor mother, whose treasure was fast slipping out of her detaining arms. God was merciful to the aching heart, and the little face grew smoother and nestled closer to Alice's warm breast, as though conscious of the coming of a sweet sleep. So the long night wore away, and while the ayah dozed on her mat, and the half-burnt logs dropped lower in the grate, Alice sat motionless in the arm-chair, watching, listening, till the feeble breaths came more slowly, and at last ceased, and a solemn stillness filled the room.

She did not cry or moan, nor did she rouse the tired woman beside her, but gently, and with caressing touch, performed the last sad offices.

When all was done, she left the ayah to keep

watch, and going to her own room, slept in utter exhaustion, only to wake in fresh pain.

The servants carried the news in the early morning, and Harcourt was speedily at the house, wishing that there were something to be done, and nervously afraid of the spectacle of Alice's grief. He was standing where they had stood yesterday, when she entered, worn and pale indeed, but quiet and collected.

"It is over, you see," she said, as they shook hands, "and I can bear it."

"I am glad of your courage; it is greater than I had hoped," he replied. How hard it was to say no more than this, to close his lips on tenderer words.

"Ah! but I have a reason." As she spoke that unearthly smile broke over her face again. "Do you remember what David said when the child died?"

"Yes; it must be so some day."

"Not some day, but soon, at any moment. The doctor told me yesterday what I have long suspected. I have my mother's complaint, a dangerous form of heart-disease."

As she uttered the words every vestige of colour died out of Harcourt's face, and he sat down trembling.

"Alice!—child!"—the voice came between a sob and a cry—"for God's sake don't say that!—it cannot be true!"

"But it is true. What—what ails you?" she asked, frightened and wide-eyed.

Then, in one moment, was swept away the careful barrier that had been built up in all these months. He tried to think, tried desperately, covering his face with his hands, to steady himself, and failed.

When he looked up, she read the answer before he spoke.

"What ails me! I do not know how to bear my life if I lose you! You have been my sunshine, my dream fulfilled, the only woman I have loved!"

She stirred, and he caught a fold of her dress.

"You never knew, you who are too pure to think a wrong thought, and I should have been silent all my life but for this. Forgive me. I am a coward to give way so! God help me, I cannot help myself!"

He dropped his head on his arm with a gesture of utter despair, and for a minute there was not a sound heard.

Then Alice spoke, with a new proud tone in her voice, and a new light in her eyes.

"And so that might have been!" was all she said, but he was on his knee now, holding her dress still.

"Tell me,—I thought of you that first day we met at Hazelshaugh; if I had seen more of you then, do you think I could have won you?"

"I cannot tell, I was such an ignorant girl then, but—ah, I wish you had!" she cried, giving him her hands. "Listen,—we shall not meet again, we could not after this, but I feel as if I were so near death that I may surely speak this once. You say truly I never knew, never dreamt of this. I have seemed to myself to fail in everything, but there must be something good in me since you care so for my life. You don't know what you have been to me, my one friend; how you have helped and comforted and strengthened me. I don't think I knew myself till now. No one else has been so near me."

"Then I too may say I have not quite failed. Bless you for those dear words. You have not been out of my thoughts for an hour since I saw you first; am I never to see your face again?"

"No; I could not bear it, nor could you. Do not grieve too much, remember our talk one afternoon——"

"I know, do you think I have forgotten? 'The gold must not complain of the fire.' I will strive not to complain, strive to live as you would have me; but oh, it will be hard! I have worshipped you so. You will let me kiss your hands once, Alice?"

Her own strength and courage were ebbing fast now, and as she felt that kiss she realised for one bitter instant what she had missed.

She drew her hands away and laid them gently

on the bowed head. He looked up again, tears dimming his eyes; Alice hesitated, stooped, and touched his forehead with her lips.

"Good-bye. God bless you, Cecil," she whispered, and the next instant he was alone.

He never knew how he got through the next few hours of that terrible day. His first distinct impression was in the afternoon, when he found himself walking in the direction of his house, and saw the doctor and clergyman talking together on the road.

"I should not wonder if she were buried with her child," the former was saying as he passed.

He was conscious of the words, conscious that the two men paused to look wonderingly at him, but he strode on to his solitary room, there to regain strength for the part he had yet to play.

Life appeared harder to him than death to Alice; for where he saw years of solitude stretching drearily before him, her believing spirit looked for the coming of an angel of light.

After that bitter parting kiss, she had fallen on her knees at her bedside, and there are those, no doubt, who think that she should have been overwhelmed with shame and penitence. Had she encountered this revelation in the midst of her ordinary existence it must have so affected her, but coming as it did, she viewed it otherwise. In these supreme moments films fall away, and nature de-

clares what is, as well as what custom says ought to be. Alice had often thought over the events of her short life; she had, as it were, probed the past, asking herself if she were to blame for the wounds that ached so sorely. Now came a last and fearfully vivid retrospect.

She recalled once more her untroubled girlhood, with its affectionate surroundings and fanciful day-dreams; the coming of her first love, with its tremulous passion and reverent fear. She saw, with painful clearness how impossible it was that aught but misery could have come of such a union as hers. At times she had been tempted to blame her aunt, and even her father, for having permitted it, thinking that their greater experience should have shielded her from herself; now she acquitted them, for she understood that love like theirs might mistake, but could not be guilty of neglect.

Mistaken!—that was the key-note of her life, and there went up an exceeding sorrowful cry, as she thought of what might have been her lot. She could not reproach herself, she was too truthful to pretend to herself that she deserved it. She knew that she had honestly tried to do her duty according to her lights—was she to blame if she also knew that the one being who realised her dreams was the man to whom she had bidden a last farewell? Rather must she say that she had done what she could, and the rest was with God.

For Cecil himself she prayed and wept in an agony of pity, comprehending his misery with that perfect intuition that only comes once in a lifetime.

But for her, as for him, arose the necessity for self-command, and though the effort ended in a fresh paroxysm of suffering, she made the needful arrangements for her child's funeral, and telegraphed to her husband to come.

Evening found her very weak and weary, and less able to struggle with the poignancy of her sorrow, during the blank hour when Harcourt had been used to arrive.

A thought struck her as she crouched in the chair where he had sat that morning. Slowly she dragged herself to the writing-table, and sitting down, wrote these few lines, which she enclosed in an envelope with a diamond ring she always wore:—

"This was my father's ring. It is the most valuable thing I have, and I leave it to my best friend.

"ALICE."

She addressed this to Harcourt, and added the date and hour; he would know why she had done so. Then she drew a fresh sheet of paper to her, and leaning her tired head on her hand, wrote some further directions, "in case of her immediate death." A bracelet to Maud Brabazon, an Indian shawl that

she had admired to Mrs. Redmayne, and her jewelry to Walter Percy's wife—these were all her bequests. She debated whether she should also write a letter to her husband, but she decided not to attempt it. "He would not understand," she thought; "and besides, what would be the use? It is all over now."

The ayah came in furtively more than once, but did not venture to speak, for Alice seemed unconscious of her presence. The other servants brought tea, and one of them timidly begged her to take some. She answered the man gently, bidding him leave it on the table and not return.

Once more some one entered to mend the fire and light the lamp, but she was again sitting in the arm-chair, pale and silent, and he, too, did not care to speak to her.

Night drew on, and she was alone in the house, for she had dismissed the ayah; only one servant was near, and he was sleeping heavily in the verandah. Sounds of life died away outside; nothing but the occasional bark of a dog, or the baying of a distant jackal, was heard, and within the room the clock ticked sharply.

Mechanically Alice rose, wound her watch, smiling to herself as she did so, locked her writing-desk, laying the two letters upon it, and then made ready

for sleep. She stood a moment at the door of her room thinking, and turned back towards the table to put out the lamp, but paused with her hand upon it.

"Not in the dark—not in the dark!" she murmured with a shudder, the only sign of fear she had shown; then she walked quickly to the chamber where the little corpse lay, and leaving the door open, stretched herself beside it.

There she was found in the morning, at rest, one arm laid across the child, her head thrown back, as though there had been a short struggle at the last, but the wonderful smile on her lips made even the untaught ayah weep.

* * * * * *

"I have bad news for you," said the doctor, knocking at the door of the room where Harcourt still slept, having thrown himself half dressed upon his bed.

He did not need to ask what it was, and he received his visitor quietly.

"There is a letter for you on her table," added the doctor, when he had told all there was to tell. "I did not bring it, thinking you would prefer to take it yourself. Her husband should be here about four o'clock. Will you break the news to him?"

"No," said Harcourt decidedly; "I cannot do that. It is no use asking me. You or the clergyman had better do it—you, I should think. I will go up at once for the letter, and will leave a note to tell him where to find me. There's nothing else to be done."

The doctor acquiesced without argument; his experienced eye saw that here was no common story, and being a good man, he kept his conjectures to himself, and avoided gossip. For Cecil the bitterness of death had passed yesterday, and he went calmly enough to the house where lay the casket that had held his treasure.

It was easy for him to bid the servant wait outside, and when he had found his letter, he set his teeth, and passed into the inner room. There let no one seek to follow him. Men do not weep twice such tears as were wrung from him while he knelt there.

The doctor fulfilled his task as simply as he could, but when Ainsworth had heard him he was completely stunned. He was not told of the other letter, and when he found that his wife had anticipated her end, yet left not a word or token for him, a horrible desolateness fell upon him.

Utterly unable to bear the silence of the house, and shrinking with a dull pain from the sight of Alice's serene face, he hurried away to Harcourt's

bungalow, turning to him as blindly for consolation and help as a mariner trusts to his compass.

In this way Nemesis overtook Cecil speedily, but his own dumb sorrow taught him how to bear with the other's confused pain. Ainsworth even slept in the house, refusing to return to his own, and on the evening before the funeral begged Cecil to accompany him, and see the coffin closed.

"Very well, I will," replied he. "I have some flowers here,"—touching a box that had arrived that morning.

"Flowers! I never thought of that! Where did you manage to get any like these?" asked Ainsworth, who had raised the lid.

"Telegraphed for them," was the short answer.

Ainsworth looked at him curiously and sadly.

"I sometimes think she'd have been happier with you. I don't suppose we were quite suited to each other, and you and she always got on so well."

"It matters little now what we think. I ought to have told you sooner — your wife left me her diamond ring. It was in an envelope addressed to me on her table."

For a moment Harcourt felt tempted to add a

fuller explanation, and see if it were possible to make this shallow heart understand the tragedy that had been enacted so near him, but the vengeful impulse passed, and he was silenced by Ainsworth's answer.

"I'm sure she had no friend who deserved it better."

There was a touch of generosity in the words, and the same feeling showed itself when they reached the house. Ainsworth went in to the silent room alone, and when he came out he signed to Harcourt to enter.

"Take your flowers in yourself," he said huskily; and so it happened that Cecil's were the last loving eyes that looked on the face of Alice Percy.

After the funeral Ainsworth returned at once to the regiment, and Harcourt was obliged to follow him a couple of days later, after retracing the last walk that he had taken with her. Had he acted on his own inclination, he would have gone straight to England, for Mess life and Ainsworth's presence were alike intolerable to him; but careful as ever of her fair fame, he would not have it said that her death had caused so sudden a resolution. He lived on, therefore, as best he could, escaping into the solitude for which he longed, on the plea of ill-health, whenever leave was obtainable.

Happily for him, his father wrote to him in the

autumn that matters connected with the estate required his presence at home, and as soon as possible he took his departure.

CHAPTER XXII.

"*Audrey.* . . . Gather up the threads,
And finish the web of thy tale.
Hubert. Ay, in good time I will,
Love and Death are old themes,
Yet lack they not fresh flavour."
Love's Triumph.

"For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light; then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again;
And with God be the rest!"
R. BROWNING.

MAUD BRABAZON regained strength but slowly, and her friends would not hear of her attempting the journey to Europe till a better season for travelling. She was thankful to remain at Kolpore, for she had no relations with whom she could find a home, and she was resolved to avoid her husband's family entirely.

Mrs. Ainsworth's death affected her deeply, and in the first freshness of her regret, she confided much of her own history to Mrs. Goodwood. Her confession, and the manner in which it was made, drew

her friend yet closer to her, and nothing could have been more beneficial to Maud than this prolonged intercourse with a woman who was good as well as clever, and genial although she knew something of the world.

Duty compels Europeans to turn their backs on the hills at the finest season of the year. When autumn comes with gorgeous colouring and clear skies, the migration to the plains commences. Maud had then no further excuse for staying in India, and wrote to make inquiries about a passage to England.

It was perhaps only a coincidence that at this particular time Mr. Lingard should have found it absolutely necessary to visit his chief. As a rule, however, official discussions do not require the presence of a lady, yet it is certain that after the gentlemen had had a very short interview, Mrs. Goodwood was summoned, and the three were closeted together for a considerable time.

Next morning when Mr. Goodwood and his guest had gone to the Court-house, and the ladies were left alone, they proceeded, as they often did, to compound sundry delectable dishes for dinner. A good deal of amateur cookery goes on in most Indian dining-rooms, and in some cases the results are astonishing, considering the limited resources at command.

Maud, her black dress covered with a large

towel, was soon energetically beating eggs in a pretty china basin, while Mrs. Goodwood, in holland apron and sleeves, was rolling paste. A formidable array of cups, spoons, and condiments stood on the table, for several guests were expected.

In the adjacent verandah was placed a quaint iron stove, the charcoal diligently fanned by a native in white trousers and dark blue coat, the long skirt of which he had carefully gathered up while squatting on his heels. Another servant, in spotless white, waited with folded arms at the door, ready to assist when required.

Mrs. Goodwood thought the moment was an opportune one for the execution of a task that had been assigned her.

"My dear," she began, "you heard from the P. and O. people to-day, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Maud; "there's a vessel on the 19th of next month that I think would suit me."

"But it doesn't suit *me*. Mr. Goodwood and I have been talking about you again, and we can't think why you want to go at all."

"I can't live on with you for ever, you know. Even the good Samaritan didn't give the sick man a permanent home!"

"Don't you think you could be happy in India?"

"Do you mean as a lady at large—roaming the country!" exclaimed Maud, a little bitterly. "What is the use of thinking about happiness? What I

have to do is to find a decent shelter somewhere or other."

"Then why go so far to look for it? Maud, stay with us," continued the little lady, flourishing her rolling-pin, "I suppose you are not too proud to accept a room and chaperonage from us, and, for the rest, I'll allow you to keep a couple of servants and pay for your board. Will you do it?"

"I don't know. This is a very sudden idea. It is very, very pleasant. I should like to try it, you could always give me warning, you know, if I bored you!"

"Exactly; but don't stop beating those eggs, there's a dear. Then we'll consider that settled, and you may burn the P. and O. list. Elahee Bux, bring me some more butter."

Maud finished her share of the work, and then sat down with provoking calmness while Mrs. Goodwood was at the most critical point in mixing a *sauce Tartare.*

"Whose idea was it that I should stay, Mrs. Goodwood?"

"General inspiration—I mean joint inspiration. Give me the cream."

"Oh! General inspiration?"

"Dear, dear, how tiresome this is to do," exclaimed her friend, rather irrelevantly.

"You are a very bad dissembler," said Maud, quietly, "and I think I must go home."

"You will do nothing of the sort. Elahee Bux, take this away and finish it. Now, Maud, I'll give you five minutes before I begin the sponge cakes. If you don't submit to remaining, I shall think you very unkind."

"You know that I know what you mean," returned Maud, looking her full in the face.

"Well," she answered, colouring, "suppose you do—there, I told Frank I couldn't keep a secret from you, and I shall just take my own way and speak out. My dear, forgive me, we all know your married life was wretched, and you must have ceased to care for your husband years ago."

"I never cared," murmured Maud.

"So much the better for my case. You are young still, and might have a very happy life, if you would or could marry a man who is very fond of you."

"It is so soon to talk so, even though I did not care. And he knows hardly anything about me; if he knew more, would he still ask me to be his wife?"

"I am sure he would. Do not throw away your chance of happiness. Mr. Lingard will be absent in the district till near Christmas, and you needn't think too much of it till then."

"Did he propose my staying with you?"

"No, he only begged me to keep you somehow, and we thought of this plan. He said, if you were

really going, he would have to speak to you at once, which he didn't wish to do, feeling sure you wouldn't like it."

"That was considerate. Mrs. Goodwood, I'll stay, but do not tell him I found you out. Promise me that."

The promise was given, and Maud spent the autumn months in quiet comfort with her friends. When Christmas came, Mr. Lingard made his proposal, but she declined to give him any answer till she had made full confession of various episodes in her past life. Absolution being freely bestowed, she gave herself up gratefully to the enjoyment of her new happiness.

They were married in spring from the Goodwoods' house, and as Lingard rose rapidly in the service, his wife, whose beauty was infinitely greater than before, found ample scope for her social talents to display themselves.

She took Mrs. Goodwood as her model, and in no district were the duties of the Commissioner's wife more kindly and gracefully fulfilled than in that presided over by her husband.

Ainsworth lived like a man in a dream for some days after his return to Hazrabagh. Mrs. Redmayne came to assist him in arranging his wife's property, and when everything had been given away or packed up, he took another house along with Mr. Barron,

and apparently strove to banish all recollection of the past.

He resumed his old habits so quickly that the two years of his married life seemed to have slipped completely from him. The dream, in fact, was over.

In about a year he went home on long leave, and soon after he reached England he married again.

His choice fell on a rosy, buxom lass, who had an iron foundry for her dowry, and whose father was one of the wealthiest of old Mr. Ainsworth's friends. She was an excellent matter-of-fact soul, was the mother of many children as rosy-cheeked as herself, and considered her husband in the light of an ornamental appendage to her house. She delighted in his uniform, insisted that he should be married in it, and had him painted in it afterwards, life size, by the most expensive portrait-painter in London.

He was happy with her, and when his leave expired, he left the army and kept hunters.

As he grew older, he spent a good deal of time in his smoking-room, reading novels, or dozing away the afternoon.

He never spoke of his first wife, but once, after a large dinner-party, for which Mrs. Ainsworth had clad her portly person in cardinal velvet, diamonds, and feathers, his eldest daughter happened to go

into the library and found him gazing at a photograph that he held in his hand. He did not hear her enter, and she stole out again unobserved.

She had caught a glimpse of the portrait, and saw that it was that of a fair girl in a simple white dress, with a string of pearls round her throat.

Walter and Ethel Percy were the most radiant couple in the shire. They grieved heartily over their cousin's death, and it was months before Walter would let his wife lift any of the ornaments out of the cases in which Alice's fingers had placed them. But young love cannot mourn for ever, and life was too full of fresh interests and delights for the dead girl to be often remembered as time went on. At first, when a tree was cut or planted, they would say, "Alice would have liked this had she been here," but they had no daughter to bear her name and keep remembrance vivid, and as their sturdy boys grew up, they began to say instead, "Herbert will do this or that for the place when it is his."

Aunt Jane lingered for a few years in her old corner by the fire, but her memory failed, and she would call Mrs. Percy Alice or Ethel, indifferent to the sound, except so far as it was associated with her immediate comfort. Thus it might almost have been thought that Alice had faded entirely out of the recollection of her friends.

Not entirely; there were some who thought of her still.

Old Mr. Ainsworth, like his son, never mentioned her, but no persuasion ever induced him to call Robert's second wife "daughter." The husband once complained of the omission, but the old man's harsh reply stung even him.

"I had one daughter; she was a lady; your wife's a useful woman, and I have a great respect for her, but my daughter is in her grave."

Maud, in her happy Indian home, remembered Alice fondly, and paid more than one visit to that grave. For about a year the spot was only marked by flowers that she herself saw planted; but at the end of that time, a fair marble cross was sent out from England, bearing on it a name, date, and the reference, Rev. III., 10.

The clergyman had no clue as to the sender, and wondered greatly that anyone who cared to erect a monument should have so long delayed doing so. He showed Mrs. Lingard a letter he received from a firm of solicitors, "on behalf of an old friend of Mrs. Ainsworth's," giving minute directions as to the placing of the cross, and *carte blanche* as to expense.

Maud had a tenacious memory for trifles, and she remembered hearing that Messrs. Bowland and Brown had long been employed by the family at Wynnburne Court. Her conjectures as to the

identity of the unknown friend received confirmation when she found, by comparing dates, that the cross had been despatched from England immediately after the marriage of Captain Ainsworth to Mary Arabella Steele.

The Redmaynes also kept Alice's memory green. As their girls grew older, they asked questions about the friend whose shawl mamma wore so seldom, and folded up so carefully. The answers they received impressed them, for hardly any other subject made their mother's cheery voice tremble, and their father's kind face grave.

When they were blooming into womanhood, these impressions were with them still, and not one of them but hoped she might be as pure and good as the beautiful lady who lay far away among the hills that they only faintly remembered.

And Harcourt?

Many a woman looked admiringly at the grave handsome face and quiet eyes, but those to whom he spoke recognised in his unmoved courtesy the manner of a man for whom love is over. Some trusted him when in trouble, and they never repented it, but not one of them ever hoped to win his heart.

As soon as he reached England, he sent in his papers, and wrote a kindly farewell to Major Martyn, that reduced that worthy officer and Dick Redmayne to a state of the deepest gloom. They felt that any

remonstrance would have been useless, even had there been time for it, but the —th was never quite the same to them afterwards. It is to be feared that the new ensigns swore, under their breath, at the unfavourable companions that invariably began with—"Ah, when Harcourt was in the regiment!"

When the business that had taken him home was concluded, Cecil sought his father in the oak-panelled room where he wrote his letters in the morning. The old man was wonderfully hale still, but the white locks were scantier and the head scarcely so erect as when his son first went to the East. He was busy with some papers when Cecil entered and stood opposite to him, leaning on the back of a high red leather chair.

"Father," he began abruptly, "I must do a thing that will vex you."

"It will be for the first time in your life then. What is it? You haven't chosen a wife I shall not like, have you?"

"I shall never marry. Believe that, and do not speak of it again. I must go away for a while, six months perhaps, and I want to lose myself completely, and leave no address."

Sir Arthur looked up, startled.

"That's hard on us, Cecil, when you've just come home too. What has happened? Can I do nothing for you?"

"Nothing, except be silent about me. Father,

I've gone through an ordeal, and I want time to get my bearings again."

"I see you have, my dear boy. You look older than I in some ways, Cecil. And you cannot tell me about it?"

"If I could speak to anyone, you know it would be to you; but I cannot—at least, not yet. I've done nothing to disgrace our name, father."

"You needn't tell me that, son."

"I've never been really alone—never had a chance to get my bearings, as I said before; and that's what I want. I should like to start in a couple of days or so."

"Do so, then. I can quite understand your feeling. I'll arrange about money for you."

"Thank you. I'll let you know about it."

He was leaving the room, when a wistful look in the old man's eyes struck him, and he came back, and laid a hand lightly on his shoulder.

"My dear old father, how good you have been to me ever since I was a little lad at school, and you used to come to see me! I am horribly selfish. I'll leave an address with you."

"No, my boy, for I shouldn't be able to help writing to you—and that isn't what you want. Go and right yourself in your own way—only remember that I'm getting old, and don't go and break your neck, like that youngster one read of in Switzerland the other day. You were always my favourite, Cecil.

Jack's a fine fellow, but he's not the man to win that red ribbon of yours."

"And I'm not the man to be president of an agricultural society, father," said his son, laughing. "After all, father, Jack's shorthorns are of more use than my Cross. I'll take good care of your favourite, though, never fear."

Father and son shook hands with the frank affection they never were ashamed to show to each other. There was an old French strain in the Harcourt blood, to which these two probably owed the slight demonstrativeness that made them both so loveable in their home. They were wonderfully like, and they felt it as they looked in each other's faces; but the elder saw that the lines in his son's countenance told of sorrow and disappointment, such as he had never known.

Cecil's conscience smote him before he had been long abroad, and he wrote to Sir Arthur from an out-of-the-way Italian village. There he sought solitude in the mighty chestnut groves that clothe the slopes of Vallombrosa; there also he did many a kindly action when listening to the sorrows of the peasants, who crowded of an evening under the wide chimney of the quaint little inn.

Before three months were over, his brave spirit had recovered its balance, and he went home to watch over his father's declining years, accepting his own lot quietly, and holding the memory of his love

as a golden thread on which to fasten thoughts and actions.

He outlived Sir Arthur, but not for long, and he died, as he had lived, for a woman's sake. He was staying at a full country house, when in a red winter dawn there was an alarm of fire. In the panic that ensued he alone could discipline the frightened crowd, and organise their blundering efforts. Cool and collected, his clear voice rang out over the noise, giving directions and encouragement, so that a great deal of property, and, it was believed, every life, was saved. The fire was gaining ground fast, when a terrified girl, who had been sleeping in an upper room, and in the confusion had missed her way, sprang shrieking to a window, ready to throw herself out.

"Stand back," shouted Harcourt. "I can save you yet!"

Catching up one of the wet blankets he had been using, he dashed into the house, while a shrinking hush fell on the spectators.

Seconds seemed hours, and the smoke was pouring faster from every opening, when his voice was again heard, calling for help, in the hall. Some men rushed in, and speedily re-appeared, carrying both him and the girl.

She was safe, carefully wrapped in the blanket, but he was terribly burnt, and had been hurt by a falling beam. He had had just time to fling his

fainting burden from him, so that the wood only caught her clothes, while its whole weight fell on him.

From the first there was no hope of his recovery, and many thought that the one life had been dearly purchased at the cost of the other.

Cecil himself bore his sufferings without flinching, and only expressed anxiety lest his brother should not arrive in time to see him, or should not bring a packet for which he telegraphed. Also, when he recovered from his first insensibility, he felt eagerly in his breast for something that apparently he found untouched.

Jack came as fast as a special train could bring him, and hurried to his brother's bedside, utterly unmanned by the suddenness of the blow.

"Don't grieve so, Jack, old fellow," said Cecil. "I always said you were the one to do justice to the old place, and keep up the name. Look here, I shan't last long, and I want something done. Try to be steady."

Jack complied as well as he could, and his brother continued,

"I've only the use of one hand, so I can't do it for myself. Feel for the gold chain round my neck, and take off the ring that's on it. Put it on my finger. I may wear it now," he added, with a bright smile. "Fasten the chain again, Jack; see that I am buried with it on, and the ring too. You've got that

packet—it's only some letters—promise that you'll lay it in my coffin with your own hands. Let no one else touch it."

"I will."

"Then one thing more, and I've done with life. It's a queer request, and people will think me a heathen, but it won't matter to me, and you won't mind?"

"Cecil!"

"I know, old fellow, of course you won't. Put anything else you choose on my gravestone, but somewhere or other put this—

"July 15th, 18—.

"'TRUSTIE TO THE END!'"

THE END.

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